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Christian Faith and
Doctrine Series

I

THE
INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY
OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

BY

JOHN MONRO GIBSON, M.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE DEVOTIONAL USE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE,"

"THE UNITY AND SYMMETRY OF THE BIBLE,"

"ST. MATTHEW IN THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE," ETC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

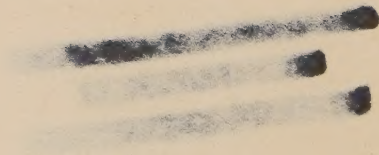
PRINCIPAL FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.



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INTRODUCTION

BY PRINCIPAL FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.

I

ONCE there was a dragon almost as large as the world, and he was surrounded by a mighty brood. And they lay heavy on the hearts and thoughts of men. But slowly the heroes of the world mastered and slew them. And as they slew them, to make sure of their end they burnt them, and the prodigious dust and ashes were cast upon the sea. There they settled down to the bottom in a dense mass, which covered the whole ocean floor. And there, in course, it condensed and set ; so that when the ocean retired, in the great convulsions of the world, there was left a thick layer of flinty rock in the lowest parts of the earth. And it cost the inhabitants almost as much labour and danger to blast these rocks as

it cost their forefathers to destroy the dragon-brood. But destroyed they had to be, to give room for the growing life and teeming energy of the new race.

Now this is a parable. The dragon-brood is the family of prodigious old error which threatened to swallow up the children of light and truth. And the heroes are the men of the Spirit, called and equipped by God to encounter the error, and slay it with the arrows of light. And so they break it to pieces, and bring it to dust, and scatter it to wind and water. But from being dangerous in one form, it goes on to be deadly in another. And it settles down on the lower levels to be the densest and most impenetrable stratum of all. It no longer rages with tooth and claw, but it presents the tough inertia of compacted ignorance, prejudice, use, and wont; and it offers to progress that dense passive resistance which is so much harder to deal with than keen active revolt.

It is one of the depressing things in social growth—the persistence and recurrence in lower strata of old fallacies that had long been disposed of in the region of the higher

knowledge. Just as there are said to be in England (or were till recently) spots where the conditions, social and mental, reproduced those of the fifteenth century; so that we had the middle ages surviving in the basement of the nineteenth century; and as there are certainly, in the extreme south of Italy, regions where, under the thinnest veneer of Catholicism, there still subsists the paganism of two thousand years ago both in its charm and its superstition—so it is also in the history of opinion. We have mental strata where there still flourish pertinaciously and securely views and habits of mind which have long gone to limbo in quarters where wisdom is spoken among the full grown. Think of the Greek Church and its level of intelligence. Think of the Roman Church in Spain.

Now these references have been mainly stirred, as I have indicated, by the obscurantisms of the unreformed churches. The Reformation brought in a new spirit. But the various parts of Protestantism move at different paces. And while one cannot but respect the hesitation and caution of many who still cling to impossible and even harmful views of Scripture, one has still more

sympathy with those who try to mediate—not between views but between the learned and the public.

II

There is no more difficult position to-day, nor one which evokes less sympathy, than that of the minister who has to stand between the world of modern knowledge on the one hand and the world of traditional religion on the other, and mediate between them. It is not a case of adjusting his own faith to the new knowledge. He has done that and can go on doing it. It is a case of adjusting the new knowledge to the untaught faith of others, and doing it in the way of reverence for truth, love for men, and regard for the growth of living faith. Any vulgarian can destroy and offend. But the task of the veracious, alert, and paternal-minded man who has to rear faith amid a world of commotion, to establish the soul in a public war of elements, and to secure the Eternal in a tempest of change, is very delicate and very severe. The more so as its difficulty is of a kind that does not readily come home to most people, even of those in his charge. The plain man, whose demand for a plain

Yes or No Christ was always baffling, has no idea what it costs to make a traditional creed a moral reality, and to turn, as our Lord Jesus had to do, a conventional Messiah to a spiritual Christ.

And what the Church seems to require most, at the moment, is less an army of scholars engaged on "research work" upon its origins, than a growing body of men at once disciplined to scientific sympathies by a proper education in its schools, secured there also in a theology of experimental faith, and at the same time provided with the art of public teaching, and endowed with the sympathy and tact which win the trust of the evangelical public. The army of research is sufficiently well recruited; also its van has been going faster than the main body can follow, and becoming detached from its evangelical base both in sympathy and in results. What we need is a supply of capable middle-men (if the term may be allowed) or adjusters, who know the new truth, the old faith, and the believing people, and who can mediate the inevitable transition without fatal accident. The premises are being rebuilt, but the business must be carried on; and the builders must be competent to manage both

without loss in the process, and with great gain in the end. The education of our ministers must keep this increasingly in view. The unsettlement among them produced by contact with the crudest of "advanced" views, is a severe nemesis upon the neglect by the Churches of the colleges, or the neglect by the colleges to provide a theology which (like the study of medicine) makes its pupils its enthusiasts. The circumstances of the time make this a requirement quite as essential as pulpit fervour or pastoral skill. But the Church public is unconvinced. The colleges are starved both of funds, and, still more, of sympathy. Students are tempted to regard the colleges as the Churches do, and not take them seriously compared with pulpit *éclat* or philanthropic activity. Which can only prepare the future for an eclipse of faith, just as it has much to do, from the past, with faith's occultation at present. The worst heresy is incompetency, degenerating into quackery. It cannot be too clearly understood that no amount of well-doing, and no amount of zeal, and no amount of ethereal mysticism will save the situation which is being forced upon us. If men do not know what to believe they will soon not know

what to do. We need men of experimental historic faith, who are also exercised in the knowledge which is creating the present crisis. Knowledge will not do it, but it cannot be done without knowledge. And multitudes of our teachers and preachers, truly religious men, are crying out, "Would God I had a definite creed for my mind, and a positive gospel to preach." We are in a social position growingly complex, to which naïve religion though indispensable is inadequate, and an intelligent, not to say scientific, religion is required. The mere hierophants only gather groups, and strike flashes; they vary between pathos and bathos; they are not equal to the needs of a great Church and the public it faces. And only two courses are possible—either to stand on every statement of an infallible book, or to treat extreme rationalism with a higher reasonableness, meet the critics on their own ground, accept results tested by their own methods in sounder hands, watch the mere philologist, edit the reports brought by the Uhlans of research, distrust all criticism inspired by a negative dogma rather than by historic science, and proceed amidst all in the experienced liberty with

which Christ crucified has set our conscience free to be sure and bold in Him.

III

This little book of Dr. Gibson's appears to me to be an admirable example of his arduous work in this kind. The autobiographical interest stirred by its foreword is great. We have here a man of the ripest pastoral experience, gathered from a long life which yet has not been wholly immersed in pastoral and ecclesiastical cares. He began in the old theory of inspiration, in which he would have remained had his been a metallic, inert, or mechanical mind. But his warm and capacious personality, his mental interest in the merits of the case, his reading kept up, and his experience in dealing with perplexed souls, have combined to urge him out into another conception of things, in which he finds the Bible's true life, power, and promise for the future. He says he does not profess to be an original scientific mediator. He is a *ductor dubitanti* and not a *dux certaminis*. He is a servant of the Church rather than of the schools. His book is a flower of ministry rather than militancy. It is calculated (if

I may presume to say all this) to be of the greatest use to multitudes, especially of young people, in our Churches, who are not only bewildered in their faith, but in great risk of losing it. It will do very much to bring home to such the saving distinction of the Bible and the Gospel, even while it insists on their inseparability. It is true, lucid, genial, and vivacious. It is very honest and very relevant to those he has in view—a really educative and sympathetic book for all such. His method is sound, and his principle is therefore historic. There is a flow and a lift in the book. It is the work of a man who knows his Bible both from without and within—as the scholarly minister should—one who writes with his eye on the object, his heart in his theme, and his mind alive to what is going on round him. He sees (as he himself desiderates) not only the track but the landscape. He is really facing the situation, and not butting at it. And his prime object is not to be modern, but to have modern sympathies—to have the modern mind, not so much in the way of starting from it, but of duly allowing for it. He makes a valuable protest against the vice of apriorism, which comes down on

the Bible with a theory of inspiration really drawn from rationalist expectations, instead of rising out of the Bible from its inductive treatment as faith and science alike must do. He shows how the rationalism of orthodoxy has its congenial nemesis in the rationalism of heresy. He begins with the facts. Let the Bible speak. That is the essential principle of criticism. What does the Bible really say? What does it say about itself? Very little about its own indubitable inspiration, as Christ had little to say about His own sinlessness. Let us get at the facts, and then treat each fact according to its nature. In a fact like the crucifixion we need only believe; but a fact like Christ crucified we trust for ever and ever, and trust it with ourselves and our destiny.

I venture to regard Dr. Gibson's book as a real service to the Churches he has served so long. It is a ripe fruit of that long service. And it is a worthy help to the Church's confidence in that progressive theology which revolutionaries are throwing back for a generation, but which is itself a part and effect of the vast Redemption in the Saviour who gives His Church its charter and its life. Criticism exercised by

faith is one thing ; criticism inflicted on faith is another. The one is an essential part of the Church's reformation by the Spirit ; the other is a part of its regulation by the world. The one belongs to the nature of the Free Churches ; the other is a subtle piece of Erastianism.

IV

I should like to add a word of sympathy, so far as I may, with the whole enterprise of the Free Church Council, wherein Dr. Gibson's book leads the way. The question of belief is becoming a much more serious matter for the Free Churches than the question of their public work or social sympathies. For these concern their relation to the public, while their faith concerns their existence. And it is unfortunate that our rank and file should be left to pick up stray notions about the great subjects from casual sermons, or still more often from brief abstracts of sermons, in which the piquant phrases are culled and tied up in small bunches, while the essential points are missed, and the argument vanishes. The more the cheap press touches such things, the more needful it is that fresh effort

should be made by those responsible for our religious stability to guide serious and intelligent minds in a duly serious way. There were never so many in all the history of the Church crying out, "Where am I?" as there are to-day. I do not of course refer to aggressives and destructives. I refer to those to whom it is a pain to feel their feet slipping from them, or a concern to think their ground is undermined; who have a real though bewildered faith, and who desire above all things to believe if they could see their way. To many such this enterprising series of books should be of great use. They are written by men who know how the land lies, and who have the secret of reaching the public with their own settled faith. They are able men and trusted. The little books can be carried where larger works will not go, and they can be read for their excellent style by those to whom a scientific terminology would be jargon. After a certain point, of course, there must be scientific terminology, but for the public this series has in view it is not only useless but irritant. The writers may be trusted to see to it that neither the science nor the religion of the situation suffer in their hands.

P. T. FORSYTH.

INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY
OF
HOLY SCRIPTURE

PERSONAL FOREWORD

THE task of contributing to the discussion of so difficult and pressing a subject as "The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture" is one which I should not have ventured to undertake, had it not been laid upon me with great urgency, not only by the editor of this series, but by many other friends well entitled to be heard. I am only too keenly conscious of my inability to deal adequately with a subject so momentous, with the limited reading on it which has been possible to one so full of engagements as I have been and still am. This disqualification would have been, to my mind, a complete bar, had it not been represented to me that a simple presentation of the subject as it appeared to my own mind might be of value to many who would not be likely to read or profit by a profound and exhaustive treatise. I confess that there is no subject to which I have given so much earnest

thought from my college days and throughout the whole course of my ministry. I was brought up to believe that the whole fabric of our faith rested ultimately on the foundation of a book which, though written by many different authors, was yet from beginning to end not their work at all, but that of God. They were simply God's penmen, and what they wrote was at His dictation. As I grew out of childhood I was sorely perplexed by many things in the Bible which seemed wholly at variance with this view, and I read with avidity everything I could find to reinforce my faith. I found great comfort in Kitto's books; but though I would feel satisfied after each particular explanation, there would remain, as the net result of the inquiry, an uncomfortable feeling that too much ingenuity had been needed, that simple truth should scarcely require so very much special pleading. Still, the positive evidence for the inspiration and authority of the Bible was so strong that I was content to leave these difficulties in abeyance; and in this state of mind I began my ministerial work forty-four years ago.

It will show how thoroughly I was imbued with the old view of the Bible, if I make

the confession that in my early ministry I wasted many precious hours in trying to make sermons out of quite impossible texts. If the Bible was all equally the Word of God, why should I not be able to use even the least promising parts of it? It was only by sad experience that I was compelled practically to admit that it was not all on the same level. Meanwhile, in spite of me, the feeling was growing that surely there must be something wrong with the idea of inspiration in which I had been brought up. It was only very gradually that relief came; but I can well remember several distinct stages, which it may be useful to specify.

The first I clearly remember came from the use of Alford's Greek Testament, especially from the position he put so strongly that not the words but the men were inspired. In that case they were not merely scribes, they were men, and the introduction of the human element, as real and not merely formal, suggested many things.

Another great relief later on was from a book of Mr. Miall, the name of which I now forget, but the thought insisted on was that the Bible was not itself the divine revelation, but the record of it. This thought

gave me immense help, and sensibly reduced the effect of the difficulties and perplexities which still disturbed me.

Some time after, I became acquainted with Lessing's tractate on "The Education of the Human Race," which for the first time brought me in sight of the progressive nature of divine revelation; and about the same time I found help in Mozley's "Ruling Ideas in Early Ages." I had been wrestling hard with some of the toughest parts of the Book of Judges, and can remember still what an immense relief it was to realize that the lesson to be learned there was not the vengeance of God, but His patience with a dark and cruel age.

About this time I was revelling in Browning. It was not then the fashion to admire him; but, hearing that there were some few who had discovered hid treasure of great price in his poems, I began to look into them, and presently came across the Epistle of Kharshish, which I found so marvellously suggestive on the story of Lazarus that I tried next the story of Saul. In reading this wonderful poem, I had my first glimpse of the modern view of inspiration. It was to me then an entirely fresh unfolding of the

human side of the experience—the natural powers of David's soul in fullest exercise, and a great unselfish love arising within him till it completely filled his heart, and then, and only then, the great message coming to him—a message which came not apart from, but in and through the working of his own mind and heart, leading in the most natural way to the startling climax, "See the Christ stand!" Yet the supernatural is by no means eliminated, but comes in what may be called the most natural way, as so beautifully shown in the opening of Stanza XIV.—

"And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant
me, that day,
And, before it, not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield and my
sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my
word,—
Still help me, who then at the summit of human endeavour
And scaling the highest man's thought could, gazed hopeless
as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance."

For me, the reading of that poem put an end to the old mechanical, unnatural view of inspiration which reduces the sacred writers to mere amanuenses.

Another epoch in my mental history was the reading of Bruce's "Chief End of Revelation." This crystallized for me the view of the Bible which had been for many years growing in my mind, making it clear that the perfection to be looked for in Scripture is not absolute perfection, but perfection for the purpose for which it is given, its unparalleled adaptation to the fulfilment of its "chief end." By this time the critical views of the Old Testament had been gaining ground. When they were first broached, I had been among the strongest in opposition. I well remember with what prejudice I read Macdonald on the Pentateuch, especially as what he brought forward promised to spoil a great many of my sermons; but I felt bound to read it, if not to accept, then to refute, his position. And in the same way I have felt it my duty ever since, so far as time would allow, to make myself acquainted with the work of the more spiritual critics, and have found thus a very great help in the clearing away of old difficulties, and in reaching a conviction of the inspiration and authority of the sacred Scriptures far stronger and more satisfactory than I ever had in the old days, when the difficulties, though

explained away, were never cleared away, but remained as a counter-weight to the accumulated evidence for the faith.

It was in this way that I came out of the comparative darkness into better light ; and it is in the hope that I may help some others into the same clear and unclouded conviction of the inspiration and authority of the Sacred Scriptures, that I try in this book to show the immense gains which have come from the frank recognition of all the facts before us, and from basing on these our theory of inspiration, instead of first settling our theory and then trying to force the facts to fit into it.

In this series, as in all the others issued by the National Free Church Council, each writer bears the sole responsibility for the views set forth in his pages. For myself, I can only say that I do not regard this responsibility lightly ; but I am helped to bear the weight of it by the knowledge, which I am not ashamed to avow, that the work has been begun, continued, and ended with the desire, and in the hope and prayer, that God may use it to lead some doubting souls into clearer light, and to settle believers in a firmer and more steadfast faith.

PART I
INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

The Inspiration with which we have to do

WE must begin by trying to get a clear view of the main subject with which we have to deal. This may be best done by an examination of the word "inspiration," which is used in so many senses that it may mean anything or nothing, so far as our subject is concerned. There is first a very broad sense in which all of us are inspired: "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding." That is what may be called inspiration in its widest sense.

More familiar is the narrower sense of the word as limited to a select few—men of genius, to wit: the poet, the artist, the musician. Equally with the last, this may be called natural inspiration, for "the poet is born, not made"; genius is the dowry of nature. To the same category we may

perhaps assign the inspiration of Bezaleel and Aholiab, and of Samson and Gideon. In all these cases the term is correctly enough used, inasmuch as it is the divine Spirit from whom come those powers which make up ordinary human intelligence, and also those special gifts with which nature's *élite* are endowed. Let us then call all this *natural inspiration*, and set it aside as irrelevant to our subject, except in so far as it lies at the base of the higher inspiration, which is often a quickening and enlightening of natural genius.

Quite distinct from both of these is the inspiration which comes not by nature but by grace, mediated by Christ (even retrospectively in the Old Testament), and bestowed in answer to prayer. There is here direct personal contact of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man. Let us then call it, for the sake of distinction, *spiritual inspiration*. But this again admits of degrees. As before, there is a broad sense in which all Christians are inspired. The Spirit is given to all who ask; and, on the other hand, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But while all true Christians are in a measure inspired, it is in very different

degrees, varying from the first breath of the new life up to the measure of the soul's capacity as indicated by the apostolic phrase, "filled with the Spirit." No one can deny to this inbreathing of the Spirit the name of inspiration; but it carries with it no authority. Not that it is limited to the recipient only, for those who have received the Spirit are called to impart to others, and when the measure in which the Spirit is received is abundant, the outflow is abundant also—"rivers of living water," as the Saviour puts it, flowing out from the soul. We have all known or heard of notable examples of this. But while there is influence—often great and blessed influence—in such cases we recognize no authority. Even a Spurgeon cannot claim the right to determine matters of faith and duty. All this further content of the word "inspiration," therefore, must be set aside as irrelevant to our subject.

Let it be observed, however, that all this range of inspiration of the kind we have spoken of as spiritual, presupposes much. We have said that it means direct personal contact of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man, that it is mediated by Christ, and that it is not of nature, but of grace. But who is

God? Who is Christ? What is grace? It is evident that the inspiration which is spiritual does not spring out of the ground, nor does it come down from heaven ready made. It is clearly the result of something that has gone before. It is throughout based on a prior revelation. The inspiration of the Christian has to do with the application of that which has been given and is now complete. But how was it given? How has it come into our possession?

The answer to this question throws us back on another kind of inspiration—the inspiration of those who were chosen of God to be the vehicles of that redemptive revelation which was to be the basis of fellowship with God through all succeeding ages. Just as in natural inspiration there are the select geniuses who are often pioneers and mark out a track for other men to follow, so in the spiritual inspiration there must be pioneers, geniuses of inspiration as it were, through whom the revelation originally comes.

Now that is just where we find ourselves in our present inquiry. We of these later days have fallen heirs to a great revelation beginning in the earliest times, waxing ever

clearer and fuller till it culminates in the pure white light of the revelation of God in Christ. It is with this period of the giving of revelation our inquiry has to do, and we shall find that during its course, in the accomplishment of its gracious purpose, there was called for and there came forth an inspiration *sui generis*, which had as its special characteristic the quality of originality and the note of authority: originality, for it was a matter of revelation, the unveiling of that which has been hidden from the ages and the generations; and authority, for a revelation on which the ages to come were to be nourished must bear unequivocal marks of having come from God, to Whom they owed themselves. Let us call this, then, in distinction from all other kinds of inspiration of which we have been speaking, *revelational* (or especially *redemptive*) *inspiration*. It is with this, and this alone, that we have to do.

Let it be noted in passing that this way of approaching the subject does away with a difficulty which has often been raised, namely, the ceasing of what we may, in view of our present subject, call inspiration proper. If the line of demarcation between

the authoritative and non-authoritative had been a date arbitrarily selected, then it would be hard to show the reasonableness of that high inspiration coming to an end. Why should there be a difference between the inspiration of Paul and the inspiration of Wesley? But when we consider that redemptive revelation was a gradual process, and that it culminated in what is known as "the fulness of the times" when all that was needed as the foundation of the new life had been given in full, we can readily see that the particular kind of inspiration should cease with the call for it. Connected as it was with the giving of revelation, it would naturally come to an end when the revelation was fully given, and nothing remained but the acceptance and elucidation and application of that which had been revealed.

This natural distinction is often missed by excellent men who wish to emphasize the fact that God has not ceased to dwell with man and to speak with him, and to send into the world men of light and leading and genuine inspiration. All this is, of course, perfectly true, but it does not set aside the fact that the revelation *of divine grace*

found its culmination in Christ, so that we do not "look for another" such as He was ; and whatever advances are made in the apprehension of God in Christ, are advances in apprehension and appreciation, not new revelations. We have no quarrel with the great truth which was in the poet Lowell's mind when he wrote :

" Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
And not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone ;
Each age, each kindred adds to it
Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.

While springs the sea, while mists the mountain shroud,
While thunder's surges burst on clefts of cloud,
Still at the prophets' feet the nations sit."

But it is evident that the words " Bible " at the beginning and " prophets " at the end of our quotation are employed in a wide and general sense, justified by usage, as when we speak of Carlyle and Ruskin as prophets, and mean by it that they had a message from God, but do not suggest thereby that they occupied precisely the same position as that of the inspired men who took part in the revelation of God which found its completion and perfection in Christ.

We have been gradually limiting the reference of the word " inspiration " till we

have reached that specific kind which is the subject of our inquiry, namely, the inspiration which, having to do with the giving of the revelation of God culminating in Christ, had in it notes of originality and authority wanting in later authors, who may nevertheless be regarded as inspired in a wider sense. But we have attempted no definition. To attempt a definition at this stage would be a begging of the question, a settling beforehand what ought to be the result of our inquiry. Besides, it would be precluded by the fact that even in this narrowed definition of our term there are still degrees of inspiration to be considered.

Here we touch a point of controversy on which we shall not at present enlarge; let it suffice to mark out one difference of degree concerning which there will be agreement. I refer to that indicated in the comprehensive utterance with which the Epistle to the Hebrews opens, an utterance which covers the whole period of the giving of revelation: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these days spoken unto us by His Son." Then follows a great passage which marks out

the preëminence of Him in whom the revelation culminates, showing Him as the fount rather than the channel of inspiration. And even when He is regarded as the subject of inspiration, the distinction is still maintained, as when St. John says the Spirit was given without measure to Him, implying that it was only in measure to others. God spoke in Him with a fulness, completeness, supremacy of authority for which there is no parallel. It is a similar kind of inspiration certainly, but by no means of the same superlative degree, in which God spoke through the prophets. And in the same way as God spoke through the prophets, Christ spoke through the apostles. Their inspiration then was on another plane than the manifestation of God in Christ, in which His inspiration consisted. And it is the nature and extent of that inspiration with which we have to do when we speak of the inspiration of the Scriptures; for while Christ and His Cross is the subject of the Bible as a whole, He is not the author of a single book or a single line in it. His writing was on lives, not on parchment leaves. The great question for us then is, What are we to understand by God speaking

through the Prophets and Christ speaking through the Apostles? It is not, therefore, the very highest degree of inspiration with which we have to deal; but that which approaches most nearly to it—the inspiration, specially of the Prophets and Apostles and generally of all the writers of the books which are known as the Holy Scriptures.

In following out our inquiry we shall find, first (in Part II.) an elect nation called of God to receive and convey to the world His message of salvation, and next (in Part III.) individual men selected and empowered by the agency of His Spirit to make the message articulate—the witness of all converging on Him who is the Word of God, and by whose sacrifice alone the world can be redeemed.

CHAPTER II

The Field to be Explored

OUR title says "the Inspiration and Authority of the Bible." "The Bible" then is the field to be explored. We have been accustomed from our childhood to understand by the Bible a single well-known book we believe to have been produced by that special inspiration which has to do with the giving of revelation. But when we examine our Bibles, we find that it is not one book but sixty-six; and in fact the word Bible is not a correct translation of the title first given to the Scriptures by Chrysostom, for the name he gave was *Τα Βιβλία*, not the book, but the books.

On what principle have these sixty-six books been chosen as of special inspiration? If we have to defend the claims of every one of them, and to form our theory of the nature of inspiration from what we find in

them all, we ought to know the authority for including all these, and these only, in "the Bible." They certainly do not all claim for themselves to be given by inspiration of God. Very few of them do. Many of them, especially the Prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul in the New, make the claim, not indeed for the books, but for the message which the books contain. But the claim is made for them all—by whom?

(1) First as to the Old Testament. Our Lord evidently deals with the Old Testament Scriptures of His day as given by inspiration of God, and the famous passage in the Epistle of Paul to Timothy gives a similar testimony. But how many books are thus certified? There were two collections of sacred Scripture then in existence, both in current use, the Hebrew original and the Septuagint translation. The latter was much the more familiar, for the original Hebrew was by that time a dead language, and, indeed, it was through *targums*, translations and paraphrases into the vulgar tongue, that the Hebrew collection was best known. Moreover, it was from the Septuagint that our Lord Himself and His Apostles most frequently quoted. But the Septuagint

included many more than the thirty-nine books we now have in the Old Testament; it included the whole of the Apocrypha, not separated from the rest as is customary in English Bibles which contain it, but mixed in with the other books. Are we to understand then that our Lord certifies the whole of the Apocrypha as of equal authority with the other books? This would broaden the field of inquiry very considerably, and largely increase our difficulties. If, on the other hand, we assume that He only meant to certify the Hebrew collection, as might be argued from His reference to "the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms," in Luke xxiv. 44, we have still the fact to deal with that He generally used the Septuagint, and left no warning against treating the whole of it as authoritative. From which we gather that for some reason or other He did not consider the subject of vital importance. This may seem strange to some good people, but it is a fact, and it is our duty as loyal disciples of our blessed Lord, to accept the position He takes in the matter without venturing to criticize it. We shall, I believe, afterwards find that there is excellent

reason for His not being precise in His teaching in this particular.

But even if we had good reason for restricting our Lord's certification to the sacred Scriptures according to the Hebrew collection, we still are in difficulty, inasmuch as we cannot tell how many it contained at the time of our Lord; for the Hebrew canon, including the books we now have, was not made up till more than half a century after our Lord's death. There were doubts and disputes going on among the Hebrew authorities as to Esther, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Ezekiel. It was not till A.D. 90 that the canon of the Hebrew Old Testament was made up as we have it now, and even then the authorities were not unanimous. The decision was by majority. And though there was this indeterminateness as to the Hebrew canon in our Lord's time, He does not consider the matter of sufficient importance to give authoritative pronouncement as to the number of books to be included. This again is a fact which is not to be set aside, but reverently accepted in the spirit of loyal trust.

(2) As to the New Testament we have

no guidance whatever from our Lord or His Apostles, except indeed our Lord's special promise of guidance to His Apostles which would give a sanction to such books of the New Testament as were of apostolic authorship. There are those, indeed, who have appealed to the solemn warning at the close of the Book of Revelation against adding to or taking away from "the words of the book of this prophecy," contending that it is an apostolic certificate of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, or even of the sixty-six books of the Bible, as containing all, and alone containing God's authoritative revelation; but no intelligent person can take this ground now. "The book of this prophecy" is the book in which the passage occurs, namely, the Apocalypse; and, as a matter of fact, several of the books of the New Testament were not then in existence, and most certainly there was no volume of the New Testament, or of the Bible as a whole, till long after this sentence was written. We must then have in view the fact that we have no means of knowing the mind of Christ or of His Apostles as to the exact number of the books to be included in the Bible.

How then was our present Bible made up ? The answer to this is long and difficult. If the matter had been of supreme importance, we may be sure that we should have had a voice from heaven or some quite decided intimation of the divine mind. But instead of this there are long discussions as to some of the books, both of the Old Testament and the New, leading gradually to a general acquiescence in regard to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven of the New which we now have, but with a mark of question left against a few which are spoken of as “deutero-canonical” (*i.e.* canonical in a secondary and somewhat doubtful sense), to distinguish them from those which are acknowledged by all to be canonical. But there still remains a distinct cleavage as to the books known as the Apocrypha; for these are all accepted by the Roman Catholic Church as equally canonical with the rest, while the Reformers rejected them. In this connection it is worth noting that there had been so much vagueness as to the canon of Scripture for some fifteen centuries, that the Council of Trent, meeting in 1546, found it necessary to make an authoritative declaration as to the canon

of Scripture ; which shows that there was no previous pronouncement decided enough to suit their purpose. On the other hand, there were similar pronouncements from the side of the Reformation, such as the list of books in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church, distinguishing the sixty-six books which it recognized as canonical from the books of the Apocrypha which may be read “ for example of life and instruction of manners,” but “ not to establish any doctrine ” ; and the list of books in the Westminster Confession of Faith which coincides exactly with what we understand now by “ The Bible.”

While then we have no distinct and definite divine authority for including all our sixty-six books and none besides, we have a general consensus of Christian opinion, including all the Churches of the Reformation as well as the Church of Rome, as to the canonicity of these books. We may therefore take as the field to be explored :

(a) The books which come to us on prophetic or apostolic authority ;

(b) Those which, though not bearing the names of apostles or prophets, have yet been recognized as canonical by what may be called universal consent ; and

(c) Those which have not been universally acknowledged, yet have established such a claim as to have found a place in the collection of sacred Scriptures, which has survived the controversies of fifteen centuries, and is now generally accepted.

The importance of keeping these distinctions in mind will be recognized when we consider that while we have to deal with facts gathered from the whole field, we do not feel exactly the same responsibility for what we find in much disputed books, such as Esther in the Old Testament or the second Epistle of Peter in the New, as we have in the writings of clearly authenticated Apostles and Prophets. And those who are acquainted with the Apocrypha will recognize what a relief it is to be free from the necessity of claiming special inspiration for all the books which it contains.

Let it be noticed, before passing from the subject of the canon, that our faith does not depend at all on the canonicity of those books concerning which the evidence is not quite complete. If we were restricted to those portions of the Bible which have all the marks of canonicity—those books which can be proved to have been clearly in the

mind of Christ when He used the Old Testament Scriptures, and those parts of the New Testament which are clearly of apostolic authority, we should still have abundance, not only for faith in God and in His Son Jesus Christ, but for all the truths which are of vital importance to our salvation and eternal life. We need not then vex our souls in the slightest degree that we have no supernatural certification of all the books of the Bible. We ought rather to acknowledge with adoring gratitude that, while there is some doubt as to outlying parts of Scripture, there is abundance in those parts which are fully certified to lead the soul from darkness into light, to guide any earnest inquirer to the Saviour of mankind. We need not find fault with the penumbra, if the central luminary shines clear and glorious.

CHAPTER III

The Method of Exploration

NOW that we see clearly what it is we have to study, the next question is as to the method we should follow. Shall we first settle in our own minds the precise nature and extent of inspiration according to our ideas of what God ought to do, or is likely to do ; then diligently seek out all that can be found in the Scriptures themselves which seem to confirm our view, and when anything is observed that seems to conflict with it, either leave it out of account or ingeniously explain it away ? This is the method which has till quite recently been most popular with the defenders of the authoritative inspiration of the Scriptures. They have postulated as a necessity of the case the emancipation of all the writers of Scripture from the effects of human weakness and limitation. They have said that if we

cannot have the guarantee that every word these holy men of old have written expresses accurately and fully the mind of God, the whole thing is useless, because if these people who are the vehicles of revelation cannot be trusted in everything, they can be trusted in nothing. This is what may be called the rationalistic method of proceeding, for it starts with a theory framed in accordance with what the theorist regards as reasonable, and deals with all the facts of the case in the light of that theory. It is a vice of method precisely analogous to that of those who begin their study of the Bible with a theory of the universe which seems to them the only reasonable one, and insist on making everything they find square with their theory. This has been the basis of a great deal of the destructive criticism which has done so much mischief in the last generation. A Bible critic would start with a naturalistic theory of evolution which ruled out all divine action as inadmissible. Hence every statement which implies divine action must either be discredited and denied, or else explained in such a way as to resolve the case into one of natural causation. Thus the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and all the mighty

works of Christ must either be denied or explained away. Surely it is clear that such Bible study is wholly vitiated by the false method of first making your theory, and then forcing the facts to fit it.

There is this great difference between the two cases, that the one uses the faulty method for the destruction of the authority of the Bible, the other for its defence. But surely the end does not justify the means ; surely there is mischief, if not disaster, to be expected from the use of a method which is wholly discredited since the time of Bacon. Indeed, all the progress of modern science has been attained by the discarding of this method and the adoption in its place of humbly sitting at the feet of nature, accepting all the facts, making room for every one of them, and only after all have been looked at and duly weighed, venturing to construct a theory which will include every one of them.

An astronomer of the olden time settled in his mind first that the universe might be divided into two parts, superlunary and sublunary, the former the abode of perfection, the latter of imperfection, and next that the circle was the only perfect figure ; then

he would teach that the orbit of all the planets beyond the moon must be circular. To suppose them other than circular would be to ascribe imperfection to that which God must have made perfect. Thus the matter was settled beyond all contradiction. The modern astronomer settles nothing in his mind beforehand. He begins by studying the facts of the case. He examines with care the orbits of Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and finds that not one of them is circular, and therefore that the theory of the circle as the only perfect figure must be given up. Which of these is the correct method of inquiry? Surely the latter.

It is this latter and humbler method on which most thoughtful students of the Bible now proceed. Instead of determining beforehand that God must reveal Himself in a manner which shall preclude all possibility of the smallest mistake or the slightest imperfection on the part of the agents whom He will employ for the accomplishment of His purpose, they set themselves to find out what God actually has done; they look at the whole field of Scripture, try to take in all the facts, and then, after having studied them carefully and allowed them all their

due place, they form their conclusions as to the nature and extent of the inspiration which God has been graciously pleased to employ. Their theory of inspiration is formed, not at the beginning, but at the end of the inquiry. It is formed, not on the rationalistic principle of deciding it in one's own mind, and then drilling all the products of inspiration in accordance with it, but on the modest principle of sitting at the feet of the inspired writers, and especially at the feet of Christ Himself, the great Master, and accepting what they find there as in accordance with the mind and will of God. The theory of inspiration so reached may not seem so satisfactory as the one made in advance, just as the ellipse did not seem so satisfactory as the circle; but it will, at all events, be reached by a method which is honest and straightforward, free from all taint of rationalism, ready to accept as best what God will give, though it be not exactly what we think best.

As it is the inspiration connected with revelation with which we have to do, it will be well first to investigate the facts discovered in our field which show God's method of revelation. This will give us a general view

over the whole field, after which we shall be in a better position to discover God's method of inspiration. This general survey will show us (1) that God chose a particular nation to be the channel through which the revelation should come; (2) that it was given by a gradual process of teaching and training; (3) that it culminated in a complete and final revelation of God in a human life.

PART II

INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE REVELATION

CHAPTER IV

A Prophet Nation

THE first thing we notice when we look at the Bible is that it is primarily a history of Redemption, and secondarily a history of the Hebrew nation. The call of Abraham comes early in the first book, and the destruction of Jerusalem occurs towards the end of the apostolic period. We further find that it is to the Hebrew race we owe the entire collection of books; even the Apostle of the Gentiles was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. The first fact we have to deal with, then, is that of an elect and inspired people—a nation singled out from other nations to receive God's special redemptive revelation and to give it to the world.

This is not a mere inference from the general fact we have just referred to. It is a claim distinctly made and continually

repeated throughout the Bible. We read that when God called Abraham out of Chaldea to be the founder of the nation, it was in order that in him and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. When the nation was constituted at Mount Sinai, the same high calling of Israel was set forth in a still more distinct and definite manner: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me from among all peoples: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus xix. 4-6). And though they were very far from actually being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, yet the high calling was never quite lost sight of. Though the nation as a whole was faithless, there were always some faithful ones who kept up the tradition. We find the Psalmists, for example, expressing themselves in strains like this: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be

known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; let all the peoples praise Thee"; and again: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things: and blessed be His glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory," which latter quotation is specially to be noted as being the doxology with which the second book of the Psalter is concluded. The prophets, moreover, kept up the same strain, sounding a clearer and ever clearer note as the centuries passed; and when things grew darker and darker with the nation, they did not give up the hope, but centred it in One coming who should Himself fulfil Israel's calling, and thus show Himself to be "the Holy One of Israel." And even when the oracles seemed dumb in the centuries following the captivity, the dispersion was preparing the way for the fulfilment of all when the Holy One of Israel at last came.

This special calling of Israel is also fully recognized in the New Testament. Our Lord restricted His ministry to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and when they rejected Him, He trusted His cause

to a few chosen men of this same race. In speaking to the woman of Samaria, He said, "Salvation is of the Jews"; in the same way the Apostle Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles though he was, asserted the special privilege and prerogative of Israel (see especially Romans ix.-xi.); and in the sealing of the Book of Revelation the twelve tribes come first, and only after them a great multitude out of every nation and kindred.

Now, it is a very remarkable fact that such a claim should be made for a particular nation, especially when we know it to have been in no other way distinguished. We should never have supposed, from a study of the national characteristics and of the great facts of its history, that Israel was at all likely to be a prophet nation. But has it not been so? Is it not evident that it has been specially selected and specially trained for the purpose of being the channel of divine truth to the world? We by no means assert that they had a monopoly of truth, or of divine guidance. We believe that God has been in all history, and has guided and controlled the destinies of all the nations, and that each one of the great

nations in particular has contributed its share to the world's progress. We are debtors to the Egyptian, the Greek, and the Roman, aye, and to the great Asiatic races. There have been Lights of Asia besides those which issued from Mount Zion. But when all this is acknowledged, still the Jewish race stands alone, not only in the great world, but even among the Semitic races, which are believed to have been specially predisposed to religion. There is no such line of light in the history of any other nation in all the world. And there is no collection of sacred books to be compared for a moment with those which make up our Bible. This statement does not deny that passages may be culled from other sacred books which might stand side by side with corresponding passages in the Bible ; but when we take it as a whole, there is nothing to compare with it.

It would take a whole treatise fitly to develop this ; but we shall refer only to three things which specially constituted Israel the prophet nation—(1) their abiding consciousness of the immanence and transcendence of God, (2) their quenchless passion for righteousness, and (3) the growth through

all their chequered and even disastrous history of a lofty spirituality.

I. God-consciousness.

This is the supreme interest throughout. The Hebrew is the only literature in all the world in which God is in all, through all, and over all. We are so familiar with this characteristic of the Bible that it seldom occurs to us to think how unique it is. The only way in which we can catch the wonder of it is by comparison with other parallel literature. As an illustration of this, we may compare the Song of Moses (Exodus xv.) with the almost contemporary hymn of the poet Pentaur, who is sometimes spoken of as the Homer of Egypt. There is a certain similarity in style, as is, of course, to be expected in productions which belong to the same period; but they are as different as possible in substance. The one is full of man and his praises, while the other makes nothing of man (the name of Moses is not even once mentioned in it) and everything of God. The first three verses sufficiently indicate the tenour of the whole: "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his

rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a man of war : the Lord is His name.”

Such is the strain of the Hebrew epic; whereas in the Egyptian one the praises of Pharaoh are sung throughout, and when any god of Egypt is referred to, it is in some such fashion as this : “I (Pharaoh) have built for thee Propylæa, wonderful works of stone, I have raised to thee masts for all times, I have conveyed the obelisks for thee from the island of Elephantine. It was I who had brought for thee the everlasting stone, who caused the ships to go for thee on the sea, to bring thee the products of foreign nations. Where has it been told that such a thing was done at any other time?” Comment is needless on the contrast.

This feature is quite as obvious in Israel's history. The writers are not historians, they are divines. The victories are the victories of God, not of Israel ; their defeats are the chastisements of God, and all through their varied experiences they are

under the guidance of God. It is God first, God last, God midmost, God in everything. This comes out most impressively in the Psalms. There is one Name sounded out in every Psalm, in every stanza—we might almost say in every line. It is the Name of God. It is true that this is the most intensely human book of the Bible, emphatically the word of man. But if we think, not of the speakers, but of what they say, it is in the highest sense the word of *God*. Man blots himself out, and writes over the space the great Name, Jehovah. It is the nation's song-book; but it is not the nation's doings that are celebrated. Their sinful doings are confessed, but the great things, the "mighty deeds," are always and only the doings of God for them. The great names in the nation's history are conspicuously absent. There is no panegyric of Abraham, or Moses, or Joshua, or Samson, or Elijah. If any one is mentioned, as David is several times, it is never to signalize the man, but always to glorify God. There had been great wars and glorious victories, but we find not a word about any Hebrew commander; there is no Wellington, or Napoleon, or Frederick the Great; no

Cæsar, or Alexander, or Pharaoh ; it is the God of battles whose praise fills all the page. "Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle." "The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory."

It is the same in the quieter and more meditative Psalms. The nature songs, for example, are among the finest ever written ; but the beauties of nature are all transparencies through which are seen the glory of God. And it is the same in the songs of life. God is all and in all. For the immanence of God is a doctrine as old as the Psalter. From beyond the borders of the land there comes the wail, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat." "I go forward, but He is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him." There is transcendence, but no immanence. Now listen to the harp of Judah : "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there ; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ;

even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." The thunder is His voice, the lightning is His glance, the winds are His angels, the clouds are His chariot ; fire, hail, snow, stormy wind are His servants, the shadow of a great rock is His shadow, the flowing stream is the river of God. Immanence everywhere. Yet transcendence also : The rock is "higher than I" ; "Thou hast set Thy glory above the heavens" ; "Thou rulest the raging of the sea" ; "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul."

There are daring anthropomorphisms indeed ; but they are never belittling, they are only such as pertain to the necessary limitations of thought and language ; and there is often a majesty in them such as belongs only to the highest order of poetry. There are indeed dull prosaic souls who find in such representations only vulgar superstition : and one wonders whether they read Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth in the same wooden way. Recall, for example, the two great thunder-storm passages in the Psalter, the storm on land in Psalm xxix., and the storm at sea, perhaps more magnificent still, in Psalm xviii., both in the highest

degree anthropomorphic: the thunder the voice of God, the lightning His arrows, the tempest "the blast of the breath of His nostrils"—all a highly poetic rendering of the immanence of God in the storm most vividly realized. Yet His transcendence far above is never forgotten. When the sea-storm is at its height, and shipwreck seems inevitable: "He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters." And when the land-storm is over, there is the beautiful reflection that God was not only in the storm but over it: "The Lord sat as king at the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth as king for ever." And then, when the rain has ceased, and the winds are hushed, and the sun is shining out again, what an exquisite note of faith in view both of the might of God in the storm and the peace of God in the tranquillity which follows it: "The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace."

"Well roars the storm to him who hears
A deeper voice across the storm";

or to put the same thought in the still nobler language of Psalm xciii.: "The floods have

lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. But the Lord above is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea."

This God-consciousness is quite as characteristic of the New Testament, the only difference being that it is now God in Christ, or "the Lord the Spirit," so that the God-consciousness passes into the Christ-consciousness, which is so all-pervading in the writings of the Apostles that we have no sense of extravagance when the chief of them says, "To me to live is Christ," and again, "Christ is all and in all."

Verily, this Bible is the word—of God.

II. The Passion for Righteousness.

It may be said indeed that every one recognizes this feature as a unique characteristic of the Bible, especially since the time when the thought was so eloquently set forth by Matthew Arnold more than twenty years ago. I cannot therefore do better than quote a passage from his chapter on "the greatness of the Old Testament": "The whole history of the world to this day is in truth one continual establishing of the Old Testament

revelation: 'O ye that love the Eternal, see that ye hate the thing that is evil! to him that ordereth his conversation aright, shall be shown the salvation of God.' And whether we consider this revelation in respect to human affairs at large, or in respect to individual happiness, in either case its importance is so immense, that the people to whom it was given, and whose record is in the Bible, deserve fully to be singled out as the Bible singles them. 'Behold darkness doth cover the earth, and gross darkness the nations; but the Eternal shall rise upon *thee*, and His glory shall be seen upon thee!' For, while other nations had the misleading idea that this or that, other than righteousness, is saving, and it is not; that this or that, other than conduct, brings happiness, and it does not; Israel had the true idea that *righteousness* is saving, that to *conduct* belongs happiness.

"Nor let it be said that other nations, too, had at least something of this idea. They had, but they were not *possessed* with it; and to feel it enough to make the whole world feel it, it was necessary to be possessed with it. It is not sufficient to have been visited by such an idea at times, to have had it

forced occasionally on one's mind by the teaching of experience. No; 'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; the idea belongs to him who has most *loved* it. . . . Thy testimonies have I claimed as mine heritage for ever, and why? *they are the very joy of my heart!*' This is why the testimonies of righteousness are Israel's heritage for ever, because they were the very joy of his heart. Herein Israel stood alone, the friend and elect of the Eternal. 'He showeth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, neither have the heathen knowledge of His laws.'"

In the heart of the passion for righteousness is the great ethical conception of the divine holiness, which again is specially characteristic of the prophet nation, called first to discover, and then to proclaim, that "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts." The absolute holiness of God is so familiar a thought to us now that we do not often realize its greatness. We take it as a matter of course that the God whom we worship should be absolutely holy, forgetting that we owe to the prophet nation our realization of this truth. Compare with

Israel ancient Greece and Rome. See in Greece the finest art, the noblest literature, the sublimest philosophy, the most heroic patriotism—in a word, the highest and most perfect culture. And of all this Rome served herself heir, and added great national qualities which made her in course of time the mistress of the world and its metropolis for more than a thousand years, laying broad and deep the foundations of the great science and system of law, which comes nearest of all subjects of human thought to the science of religion itself. What might we not expect then of a religion nurtured in Greece, and fully developed in Rome? Yet despite the art and literature and philosophy of Greece, and the civic and national, political and legislative greatness of Rome, the religion which was nurtured and developed under these influences is “of the earth earthy,” sadly stained all through by the evil imaginations of the heart of man. Philosophy and letters did their best for it, but could not hide its shame. As for holiness, the conception is not to be found. Their gods and goddesses were just as ready to patronize the vices as the virtues. They had their god of wine, in whose

honour degrading revels might with propriety be indulged. They had their goddess of lust, who presided over sins that cannot be described. They had their god of thieves. And Jupiter himself, "*Optimus Maximus*," their greatest and their best, was believed by the majority of his worshippers to be guilty of the most horrid crimes.

What a contrast we find to all this in the Bible! There we have the history of a people that grew up side by side with the great nations of the ancient world—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, a poor despised people, without art, without science, without philosophy, with little culture, with much weakness and corruption in the state and in society—a nation of slaves to begin with, and not much better in the end—made to pass under the yoke of Babylon, made to pass under the yoke of Syria, made to pass under the yoke of Rome, and finally scattered abroad, a by-word among the nations—and yet there and thence, out of that so unpromising history, there springs up a conception of God which is to that of Greece and Rome as light is to darkness. The religion is not like the people at all. It is infinitely above them. And the

superiority appears especially in this, that in their lowest declension—moral, intellectual, national—remained like adamant this great truth: "The Lord our God is holy." There is only one explanation. In the great nations the religions came from the people and were like them. In the little nation the religion came from God and was like Him. The nation was a prophet nation.

This prepares the way for the third characteristic to be noticed.

III. Lofty Spirituality.

This we certainly do not claim for them in the early stages of their history. As one of their own prophets put it: "Thy birth and thy nativity is of the Land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite" (Ezekiel xvi. 3). And as their origin, so their early history. It would be difficult to find in the history of any other nation a period of more hopeless savagery than that so faithfully described in the Book of Judges. If it be maintained that the Hebrews had a natural genius for religion, it will scarcely be claimed for them that spirituality was an original characteristic of the nation. But this makes it all the

more remarkable that their literature should gradually become more and more spiritual, till at last it reached heights which have never been surpassed.

The greatness of Israel is of the spirit only. In all that is outward and material it is hopelessly out of rank with the other nations of the ancient world. This is most impressive to the traveller who passes through Egypt on his way to Palestine.

“Those temples, palaces, and piles stupendous,
Of which the very ruins are tremendous,”

speak eloquently of Egypt's greatness in the brave days of old. How changed the scene when he passes into Palestine! There indeed he sees the relics of a bygone age; but what a contrast! Little or nothing to impress the thought of Israel's greatness. There are some great remains, such as the Tower of Herod in Jerusalem, the ruins of Sebaste, the broken columns of fallen Tyre; but these are all foreign—they are Roman and Phœnician, not Hebrew. Even Solomon's temple itself was built by Phœnician workmen, and the great stones in the old wall of Jerusalem have less to tell than at first might be supposed of the might of

Israel. At most they tell of a very short period during which alone it might fairly be said that Israel was great among the nations of the earth. And the country itself—how disappointing to many! No great river like the majestic Nile; no great mountains like the mighty Alps; not even matchless scenery like the Western Highlands of Scotland, or the sylvan beauty of many an English shire. Small and poor, and unimpressive; and, therefore, necessarily disappointing to those who will forget that it is “the Holy Land,” and not “the great and mighty land” they go to see. A goodly land and large it was for a little time, and might have been always; but follow the course of its actual history, and it cannot be denied that it is in the main the history of a small and poor country, and of an inconsiderable and by no means great people. But what does all this mean? It means that Israel’s greatness is of the spirit only. “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.”

One thinks in this connection of the remarkable passage in Psalm lxviii., in which there is the suggestion of the lofty hills of Bashan looking askance at the little hill of

Zion. As the traveller proceeds northward from Jerusalem, the hills get larger and higher, until, as he reaches the Plain of Esdraelon and looks eastward, he sees the giant ridge of Bashan looking proudly down on little Tabor beside him, and even more proudly, one may well suppose, on the still smaller mount in the south, of which all the world speaks and hears. "Why look ye askance (R.V.), ye high hills?" "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan." Zion as high as Bashan! Take a foot-line and measure, says the pedantic literalist. Another gross Bible error. But, friend, is the linear measure the only measure you know? Read on: "This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in." It is spiritual altitude of which the Psalmist is thinking. And here even the Alps are small in comparison. The matter-of-fact tourist, fresh from the glories of the Bernese Oberland and the wild grandeur of Chamounix and Zermatt, may say, "How paltry are these little hills of Palestine, and how foolish to make so much of them! Here we are in front of the most famous mountain in all the world, and it is not half so high as Snowdon." Why look

ye askance? "This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in." It is not its height above the sea-level; it is not its beauty or grandeur; it is not anything that earth can do, or has done for it, that makes it so much worth looking at—it is that here God revealed Himself to men, and this exalts it, exalts it to the height of Alps or Andes or Himalayas. "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan!"

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" No question could be more pertinent or sensible on the standing ground of mere earthly evolution; and it is still appropriate as applied to the whole of Palestine. Those who visit Palestine in the expectation of finding in the land itself, its soil, scenery, people, and surroundings, a sufficient explanation, on principles of mere natural development, of the wonders that have come out of it, are, of course, grievously disappointed—"disillusioned," as it is the fashion to say. But ought those to be disappointed who have no expectation of finding the wonders of divine truth and love so easily explained? The man of spiritual discernment knows that *the* good

thing in all the world's history, the unspeakable gift of God to men, did not come out of Nazareth; and when he visits the Holy Land, and finds it no better than other lands, and in many important respects far inferior to the more favoured lands of the West, he is only confirmed in his belief that the heritage of truth, which has come down to us from ancient Israel, did not come from the land, or from the people, but that in very deed it has come to us out of heaven from God.

In all this, be it remembered, there is no question of detail. It is not whether this, that, or the other verse or book of the Bible is inspired; it is not even whether this or that particular prophet or psalmist can exhibit his divine commission. It is the whole course and progress of the history, and the literature which springs up like trees by the watercourses of divine love and grace. On the one hand we find a poor, comparatively ignorant, and very fickle and feeble people, with a history which does them very little credit, which rises into greatness only for a very brief period, and for the most part is a record of sin and disgrace and disaster; and yet, notwithstanding all this, it is a nation

whose sons have reached heights of vision which no others have attained—even Greece itself, so immeasurably above them in all that earth can do to raise men, not to be compared—heights of spiritual vision as high above even their Platos and Zenos, as their snow-clad Parnassus towers above Israel's little Hill of Zion. And it was no mere burst of development in a golden age like that of Pericles; it was a steady light, shining on and on and on, through darkest days and stormiest weather, even getting brighter and clearer in the days of national decline, and shining out in its fullest brilliancy in the age of the nation's utter fall and ruin, when out of the ashes of the holy nation's death there rises the Sun of Righteousness, the Holy One of Israel, to illumine all the world. The prophet nation passes, the Prophet of humanity abides.

IV. The Nation's Pulpit.

Consider, in concluding this most important branch of our subject, that though the Holy Land was so very small, it provided a very good pulpit for the prophet nation. It has often been objected that it is not reasonable to suppose that if God were to reveal

Himself at all, He would do it in so small and out-of-the-way a corner of the earth as little Palestine. But is the Bible only a Palestine book? And was Palestine a corner of the earth? Not so. The Bible bears in it the burden of all the world. There is no great nation of antiquity that has not its place there. And though Palestine itself was small, it was in no corner; on the contrary it was right in the centre of the world which then was—south of it was Egypt; east, Babylon; north-east, Assyria; north, Tyre, Sidon, Syria; and west, Greece and Rome. Take Jerusalem as your centre, and with a radius of twelve degrees latitude describe a circle, and you will include the capitals of all the kingdoms which figured in the main current of the world's history up to the time of Alexander the Great; and there is no other capital of which this can be said; and when afterwards, first the conquests of Alexander, and later those of Rome, quite altered the ancient balance of power, though both the capitals of the West were beyond the twelve degrees of distance, yet even these western empires might be regarded as neighbouring powers, for it was a mere

stretch of sea that lay between : in sailing westward to the coasts of Europe, the first land reached was Greece and the next was Italy.

The world, of course, was not nearly so large in ancient times as it is now ; but such as it was, the Holy Land was in the centre of it. If we think of it we shall see that it would have been impossible to have chosen a more central position. That rocky ridge lifted up above the great river-plains around, where grew and flourished the mighty empires of antiquity, was a magnificent rostrum from which to reach them all with the word of God ; and well might the Hebrew prophets lift up their voices to the nations far and near with such a cry as this : " O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord," or this : " Hear ye people, all of you, hearken, O earth, and all that therein is ; and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple." All the great nations had their great witnesses, and all at the time of the zenith of their power : there was Abraham in old Chaldea ; Joseph, Moses, in Egypt ; Jonah in Nineveh ; Ezekiel, Daniel, in Babylon ; and of the great empire

of Persia, the last of the great eastern powers, the founder himself was the chosen of the Lord to set His people free. Was not that most true which God gave by the mouth of His prophet : " I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth " ; and that grand utterance of the Psalmist : " The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth, from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined " ? Yes, Jerusalem was indeed a city set on a hill that could not be hid. It was the best place in all the world from which to send out light and truth that they might be guides to men and bring them to God's holy hill, where His dwelling was ; and, as the slow course of history has proved, that was no Utopia which was in the Psalmist's outlook when he prayed, " God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations."

To sum up, Israel was a prophet nation called of God to proclaim His message of salvation to the whole world ; and in this

unquestionable fact we have a broad and deep foundation for our faith in the inspiration and authority of the library of sacred literature in which the story of the nation is enshrined and their oracles are preserved.

NOTE.—If we are reminded that there are two books of the Old Testament (Esther and Song of Solomon) in which the name of God is not once mentioned, we might speak of the exception proving the rule ; but it is more to the purpose to remind ourselves that both these are among the “deuterocanonical” books, for which, therefore, there is no necessity of holding ourselves specially responsible. Moreover, such is the influence of all the other Scriptures which surround them, that though the divine name is not mentioned in either, it has been the habit of people always to read the providence of God into the one and the love of God into the other.

CHAPTER V

Divine Discipline through a Long History

IT is a great mistake to suppose that the giving of divine revelation was a very simple thing. Many seem to think that nothing more was necessary than putting into words what was needful for man to know. Place in his hands a book telling all that needs to be told, with the assurance that every word of it is straight from God, and the thing is done. These people forget or fail to realize that—

“ . . . It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with
death.”

Words certainly were needed, but deeds much more ; teaching was needed, but training much more. A nation cannot be a prophet nation without divine discipline.

The need of discipline is apparent even in intellectual equipment. You cannot put

a book on the higher mathematics into the hand of a tyro; and he who would master any difficult subject must not only read and listen, but must toil and strive, pass through a course of discipline—at the hands of a master in childhood and at his own hands in later life. And while discipline is necessary for proficiency in any curriculum, it is especially necessary where not only the mind but the heart must be developed, where character is the supreme achievement. It was not enough, therefore, that God should *speak* to the fathers by the prophets, it was necessary that He should *do* great things for them, while passing them through a course of discipline by which they should be prepared to be the prophet nation of the world. It is for this reason that the sacred Scriptures are in the main historical, setting forth what the Lord did for His people, and how He led them and guided them, tried and proved them, suffered them to fall and raised them up again. The Scriptures are full of this, but perhaps it is nowhere more tenderly expressed than in that beautiful passage in Deuteronomy : “ As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them

on her wings : so the Lord alone did lead them, and there was no strange god with Him."

In the work of creation it was only necessary for God to say, "Let there be light," and there was light. But with God a word is a deed. In the work of creation there was but one will to act, so a *fiat* was all. But in the far greater work of redemption there was the will of man to reckon with, as well as the will of God. There were two parties to the transaction ; and though One was omnipotent, and the other feeble and helpless, yet the will of the feeble and helpless one must not be crushed and overborne. He must not be coerced into a mechanical holiness, such as Huxley in one of his weaker moments craved ; he must be led into a willing obedience and service. This required time—long time ; and patience—very much patience—on the part of God. Hence the long discipline of the prophet nation.

It is because there were two parties in the whole process of revelation that we hear so much of "the Covenant"—the Covenant with Abraham and his seed, the Covenant with Moses and the children of Israel. What did this mean but that God could not act

alone, He must do everything in co-operation with the people? The difficulties which caused so much delay were never with Him, always with them; and the reason why the light came only by degrees was not because God grudged any more of it, but because it was all they could bear at the time. When the Lord Jesus said to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," He disclosed the whole method of the divine procedure in the giving of revelation.

Not only is it true that the people had to be prepared by a divine discipline for receiving the revelation of God, but the revelation itself was far less in word than in deed. Character is far more fully and impressively revealed by action than by speech. Suppose that from the starry sky to which Abraham looked up there had come a voice, "God is love," or that on it the words had been written in letters of light, could he have understood it? Could the three words possibly have meant to him what they meant centuries later to St. John, when, after the long discipline of Israel the record of which he had so often read, after three years' companionship with the Christ of God, and many

years thereafter of meditating upon all that he had learned from God's doings to Israel and in His Son, the great truth grew into a sun lightening all his firmament ?

This great fact that God revealed Himself in deeds is written large through the whole of the Scriptures. God spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; but if we gather together all the spoken words, they will not amount to very much—in quantity, at least ; in quality, of course, they are of the very best. But His greatest utterances were always deeds. Think what He did for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Think what He did for Joseph and through Joseph. Think what He did for Moses and through Moses. Think what He did through Joshua and the Judges, and the Kings. Read the historical psalms, and see the psalmists rejoicing in the mighty deeds of old ; hear the prophets continually reminding the people of them ; and, in the perfect revelation which came at last through the Holy One of Israel, mark how the deeds were the main substance of it : “ Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard ; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel

is preached"; the preaching of the gospel coming last, not because it is least important, but because it is the deeds which make it plain that there is a gospel to preach.

Thus it was that the children of Israel grew into the knowledge of God, getting ever clearer and fuller revelations of His unity and personality, His might, His holiness, His justice, His tenderness, His mercy, His forgiveness, His love. The revelation was both in word and in deed, but the revelation in deed was the more important and the more influential. In fact, many of the words were to call attention to the deeds, and to teach the lessons to be learned from them. The revelation, then, was progressive through a long process of divine discipline, by which the prophetic function of the nation was developed.

Here again our revelation is unique. We would not forget, indeed, that all the nations were under divine discipline, and that in this point of view the history of Israel is a key to the history of the world, which is just another way of saying that Israel was a prophet nation, not only as proclaiming the salvation of God, but also as showing the hand of God in history. But the uniqueness

of Israel's position was this, that of no other nation can it be said that it was especially trained to receive and convey to others the revelation of God.

Let it be noticed also that in this historical process of revelation we have not only relief from the most serious difficulties attaching to the view of verbal inspiration equally distributed through all the books, but also a strong and most striking confirmation of our faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible as a whole. Think how the revelation of God through the discipline of the prophet nation has been inextricably interwoven with the world's history. Our faith is not a system of doctrines or dogmas, speculations of men's minds. All the principal teachings of the Bible are bound up with great facts in history ; they are not, like the philosophy of the best of the Greeks, or the ethics of Confucius, or the original parts of the Koran, the mere product of some superior or peculiar mind, exercising its powers as best it may on the problems of life and destiny ; nor like the mythology of the heathen, founded entirely on prehistoric fable ; but so connected with great outstanding facts in the world's history which no one can possibly deny, that

a firm basis is afforded for an intelligent faith.

We saw in our last chapter how the history of Israel in comparison with, or rather in contrast to, that of the great nations all round about it, brought out the force of the prophetic word : " Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." Consider now how the contact of Israel with other nations throughout the whole of its history gives opportunity for those confirmations which come in ever-increasing numbers from ancient monuments, inscriptions, and historical records. Even as far back as Abraham we have illustrations and confirmations of the Bible story—as, for example, in the war of the four kings with five recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. As we come down, the points of contact and confirmations are more and more numerous and impressive. The history of Egypt affords many of these, from the time of Joseph onwards. As perhaps the best illustration of this, we may refer to the Exodus in connection with the contemporary history of Egypt as gathered from the monuments and the records of that mighty nation. From these it has been determined that the time of Rameses

the Great was the very culmination of the Egyptian power and glory. Of all the mighty monarchs he was the mightiest; and yet it was in his time that Moses was called out from among the Hebrew slaves and trained for his great mission; and it was when the unparalleled achievements of this mightiest monarch of all had been finished, and the fruits of his victories gathered, when the land had been filled with monuments of his mighty deeds, and the prestige of the great empire was at its height—it was then, that to his haughty and stubborn son and successor, from the mouth of one of his slaves there came the peremptory word: “Let My people go.”

When all this is set vividly before the mind, what majesty does one see in that magnificent opening of the Sinai revelation: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”! And how thoroughly we enter into the conviction of the people themselves when they say: “The Lord brought us forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm.” Verily He did. Who that thinks can doubt it? To say that these poor slaves were rescued from

such bondage and transformed into a free nation by any powers of their own, or any conceivable process of the development of free institutions, is to speak nonsense. It was not evolution ; it was salvation. Remember, it is no question of details—of flies, or lice, or frogs. Even in matters of detail there is abundant and ever-increasing confirmation, as, for example, in the remarkable discoveries from the excavations at Pithom and Raamses, so that we have no reason to be afraid of details ; but then they are distracting, and often turn away attention from the great outstanding fact which is of prime importance—that by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God did bring His people out of Egypt. Thus does God stand revealed on the very threshold of authentic and continuous history, old Egypt and its mighty monuments being witnesses to Him as the God of Salvation. Here is the way that Moses put it, in words far more enduring than the pyramids, for they are as fresh and living to-day as ever, as appropriate now as then : “The Lord is my strength and my song, and He is become my salvation ; this is my God, and I will praise Him, my father’s God, and I will exalt Him.” This one great

fact of ancient history is a broad and deep foundation, not indeed for any human theory of inspiration, but for our faith in God as mighty to save.

It would take far too long to develop the thought through the subsequent history. Suffice it to say that the divine discipline of Israel through fourteen centuries is so linked with the history of the world as known from other sources—with the histories of Nineveh, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome—that the Hebrew Scriptures, notably the prophecies, are continually illumined and confirmed by what we know of the history of other nations; so that, without descending to matters of detail, we have the main lines of that history of divine discipline through which the revelation of God and of His salvation has come to us, standing out clear and sure beyond all reach of question or cavil.*

* It immediately raises not only cavil, but serious questions, when arguments such as these, which are abundantly sufficient to prove the general trustworthiness of Scripture, are treated as if they were equally valid for establishing the theory of minute verbal inspiration. A very common practice of those who are determined at all hazards to maintain their theory is to assume that all who differ from them are trying to prove the Scriptures a tissue of falsehood, in which case all the witness of the monuments and

of the historical records would be relevant and valid ; but what they fail to recognize is that all these happily abundant confirmations of the general truth of the sacred records have no relevancy as bearing on the question between the mechanical and the spiritual theories of inspiration. And the sad result often is that, arguments which are perfectly sound and sufficient for proving the trustworthiness of the sacred writers having been brought forward as if they proved their infallibility, the vice of the wrong application of the arguments reacts on the arguments themselves ; and people, clearly seeing that they certainly do not prove the conclusion for which they are advanced, infer that they prove nothing at all.

CHAPTER VI

The Object Lesson

“**N**OW all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” The divine discipline was for Israel in the first place, but not for Israel alone—it was for all; hence, the discipline of Israel, with the revelation which came through it, has been enshrined in the sacred Scriptures, and handed over to all nations that they may learn Israel’s lessons and share with her the great revelation.

We must at this point make clear in our minds the distinction between the revelation and the record of it. The one is quite apart from the other. The revelation of God through Israel and in Christ would have been a revelation even if there had been no record of it. And both in the one and

in the other—that is, both in the Old Testament and in the New—the revelation always comes in advance of the record. God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob long before the story of the patriarchs was written; He revealed Himself through the prophets before any of the prophecies were put on record; He revealed Himself in Christ before the first of the Epistles was written, and long before Mark, the first of our Evangelists, sat down to write the wondrous story. It is mere confusion of thought, then, to make no distinction between God's revelation of Himself—to Israel, through the prophets, and in Christ—and the record of it which we have in the sacred Scriptures.

This raises the question as to the means taken to secure a trustworthy record. Such a record we have, but we cannot discover any sign of special arrangements having been made to secure it. It seems, as a rule at least, to have been left to what we may call ordinary providence. God was in it, of course, as He is in everything; and most thankful should we be that, in His adorable providence, He put it into the hearts of a sufficient number of competent

persons to write the history of His dealings with Israel, and to put on record a number of the special messages which were sent to the fathers by the prophets, as well as to set before us the earthly life of our Lord, and to give us some account of what He continued to do and to teach by His Spirit ; but there is no sign of men being specially called and commissioned to undertake the work.

We read of the call of Abraham to come out and be separate, and become the founder of a nation ; of the call of Moses to declare His Name to the people and bring them out of Egypt ; of the call of Gideon and others, in the time of the Judges, to fight the Lord's battles ; of the call of Samuel and many others, his successors, to be His prophets to the people ; of the call of Saul, and afterwards of David and his successors, to be kings, and their anointing for their special work : but we have no sign of any one being specially called and commissioned to write the history of the chosen people. If any one supposes, for example, that Samuel was called, not only to be a prophet and judge in Israel, but to write the books which bear his name, they have only to observe that his death is recorded in the first book (1 Samuel

xxv. 1), and that the rest of that book, and the whole of the second volume, tell what happened after his death; moreover, the two Books of Samuel and the two Books of Kings are bound in one volume in the Septuagint (which, be it remembered, was the Bible chiefly used by our Lord and His Apostles), with no indication whatever as to who was the author of any part of it. Nor have we any means of knowing who was the author of the two Books of Chronicles, or of the earlier Books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.

Thus, we find that the entire history, from the entrance into Canaan down to the Captivity, a space of seven hundred years at least, comes to us, not only without any sign of a call or commission to perform this important service, but without any means of finding out who the author was. This is a fact which is surely not without significance, and which ought not to be entirely disregarded, as it so often is, by inquirers who wish to be humble and reverent. We may think it unfortunate; but why should we? At all events, there it is; and we ought humbly to accept it, and to adapt to it our theory of the relative importance of the revelation itself, and the record which

enshrines it. Ezra is the first name known after the time of Moses, as a recorder of the Lord's dealings with His people. It is probable that he not only recorded the events of his own time, but that he collected and edited the histories which had come into his hands from the past. Hence we know him as "Ezra the Scribe"; yet he was called first and mainly, to do his work as a reformer in Israel, and there is no mention of any commission to take in hand either the recording or the editing. The same applies to Nehemiah. The prophets had sometimes special directions to write, as when Jeremiah prepared the roll which Jehoiakim destroyed, and again, by divine direction, prepared a second roll; but we have no evidence of any special call or commission to record the prophecies for the sake of the ages to come.

So, in the New Testament, we have the call of Matthew to be a disciple, and a further call to be an apostle; but we have no record of any call or commission to write his gospel. The Evangelist Luke tells us how he came to write his, and not only is there no reference to any special call or commission, but it is put just as if it had occurred to

himself to do it : " Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word ; it seemed good to me also, . . . "

And the Acts of the Apostles comes to us in the same apparently incidental way. The Epistles, too, were written just as occasion offered, for the use of the Churches to which they were addressed, and without any indication that the author felt himself called to write authoritatively for the Church universal and for the world at large. Not till we come to the last book is there anything which looks like a distinct call and commission to write : " What thou seest, write in a book. "

All this surely shows that, important as the writing of the record was, it was not at all on the same level with the work of those who were called to take part in the revelation itself, or were sent with special messages direct from God, as was true of the prophets. Most certainly God was in it all, guiding, prompting, inspiring ; and we should, with adoring thankfulness, recognize

His wonderful providence ; but we must not shut our eyes to the certain fact that there is no evidence whatever that God chose men so set apart from their fellows as to be above all human weakness and imperfections, and supernaturally endowed with a power to write books as absolutely free from imperfection and error as if God had written them with His own finger.

There may be those who think it would have been a great deal better if men had been specially called and commissioned to write the books of sacred Scripture, and if each of them had been given a distinct promise that they would be kept absolutely free from error ; but would it not be more reverent and humble for those who cannot help thinking such thoughts if, instead of criticising what God has done, they would rather magnify and bless His holy Name that in His marvellous providence He has not allowed His revelation to Israel to remain unrecorded, but has given this great Object Lesson to us and all the nations of mankind in a manner which, though we may not exactly see it as the best, is yet adequate to teach us the great lessons which were taught to Israel of the divine holiness,

justice, tenderness, patience, forgiveness, and loving-kindness?

Before we leave the subject of this chapter it may be well to interpose a caution against two extremes in estimating the value of the Hebrew history as given us in the Bible. There are those who think we ought to be done with the Old Testament, now that we have the complete and perfect revelation in the New. The ancient Hebrews may have needed all that discipline and those slow revealings of truth, but surely we are far beyond that now! Is it not enough to keep to the New Testament with its full, clear light? If we have the result, why trouble any more with the process? The answer is, not only that there is immense interest and valuable instruction to be had from following the successive stages of revelation, but also that God deals with us as individuals on the same principles as He dealt with the chosen nation. There is not a stage in the education of the Children of Israel which has not its parallel in the education of the children of God; hence it is that, though in Christ we have all we need, we have most valuable illustrations of "the truth in

Jesus" in these Old Testament records, and we have therefore reason to be devoutly thankful that, these things having happened to them as ensamples, we "upon whom the ends of the world have come"—*i.e.* who live in the age of the completed revelation—may learn our much-needed lessons of faith, hope, love, obedience, courage, and constancy.

On the other hand we ought to be on our guard against the opposite error of putting all the Scriptures on the same level. While we ought diligently to search and study the Old Testament Scriptures, we should always do so in the light of the full and perfect revelation in Christ our Lord, on the principle which He Himself distinctly taught us when He said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said . . . but I say unto you." Let us read always in the light of the Spirit of Christ, who, happily, is with us all the days even to the end of the world. So shall we have our Object Lesson in all its variety and value lying full and clear in the light of the Sun of Righteousness risen on us with healing in His wings.

CHAPTER VII

The Substance of Revelation

THE fact that there is a distinction between revelation and the record of it leads to the inquiry, What is the substance of revelation? Revelation is enshrined, as we have said, in the sacred Scriptures. We have discovered (Chapter II.) with a certain degree of accuracy what is the field to be explored. We have now to inquire what is the treasure in the field, to use our Lord's own illustration. Can we discover, from looking at the way in which God guided Israel, the messages He sent her, and the completed revelation in the Holy One of Israel, what it is God's desire and purpose to make known, first to His chosen people and then to the world through them?

Much of the reasoning in past times on the subject of inspiration has proceeded on the supposition that the revelation God

intended to give thereby was quite encyclopædic, covering all things in heaven and on earth, and settling for ever all doubtful disputations. This idea was due to that preconceived theory of inspiration already referred to (Chapter III.), according to which it was supposed that men inspired of God must be so completely unmanned, as it were, so thoroughly deified, that they could speak, like supermen, with absolute scientific precision on every subject they touched. It was pure theory, without a shred of evidence for it. There is no claim made on behalf of the greatest of the prophets or the chief of the apostles that he was called to set the world right on all matters within the range of man's investigation, physical or metaphysical. The emphasis is laid throughout on the things of the spirit, on the things of God. And while the subject is spiritual, the object is practical. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." That is perhaps the *locus classicus* on the subject of inspiration; yet how completely it has been discarded by

many good people in favour of the theory that Scripture was given to acquaint people with astronomy, geology, history, and everything else under the sun, and above it too. This view, however, is now practically given up. Almost every one in our day is willing to have the scope of Scripture teaching limited to the spiritual and the practical.

Even within this still wide range, however, there are certain great things standing out in such prominence as to make it quite clear that the Inspirer of the sacred Scriptures intended us to give special attention to them. We are warned again and again against making too much of the letter and too little of the spirit. The Apostle Paul says : "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life"; and our Lord, in reproof of the narrow-minded Jews who insisted on taking literally what He had said about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, made this important declaration : "It is the spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing : the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." And in this connection it is not only instructive, but most pathetic, to refer to the chief thing He has to say about searching the Scriptures, which is this : "In them

ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me, but ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." Consider the position of the Saviour of the world, for whose coming the long discipline of the prophet nation had been a continual preparation, face to face with men in whose hands was the record of it, and whose function it was to explain it to the people, but whose minds were so occupied with petty details that they missed the substance and spirit of it all. They paid tithes of mint and anise and cummin, but neglected the weighty matters of the law. They read their Bibles diligently, but had no vision of the truth therein enshrined. It was not merely that they did not see the wood for the trees, for they did not even see the trees. The outside bark they did cherish, but the inner life was missed entirely. Hence it came to pass that, for all their searching of the Scriptures, they rejected Him to whom all the Scriptures bore witness, and in whom alone they could find the life they sought.

Let us beware of making the same mistake. The revelation God has given us is very wide and very varied. But clearly there are in it greater things and lesser

things. The Bible is not a level plain; it is like the land from which it came—full of great mountain masses. It will help us to right ideas of God's purpose, if we try first to single out those great masses, the lessons which are written large throughout the inspired history of Israel, and find their centre in Christ, to whom they all bear witness.

First of all, there is the NAME OF GOD. The great object of the divine discipline of Israel was to enable them to spell out that Name. To tell the Name of God was not the easy thing unthinking people are apt to suppose. When Jacob, brought face to face with God at Peniel, made the request, "Tell me Thy Name," he no doubt expected a simple answer, perhaps in a single word. But no such answer came. What came was an answer in deed, not in word: "He blessed him there." Is not this an indication of the only way in which God could reveal His Name effectually?

Accordingly, it was not in word, but in deed, in the long course of gracious but faithful dealing with Israel, that God revealed His Name. The revelation was not complete till He came in flesh who was

the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person—not quite complete, indeed, until the crowning revelation of the Cross and the Resurrection, for at the very close of His earthly life we hear Him saying to His Father: “I have declared unto them Thy Name, *and will declare it*: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” This, then, is the main substance of revelation: the unveiling of God, gradually through the sacred history, and finally in the life and death and resurrection of Christ our Lord. It is in this above all that we see clearly the Bible to be the Word of God. In the highest sense, indeed, Christ Himself is the Word of God; but in a subordinate sense, as testifying to God and His Christ, these Scriptures are entitled to this unique designation.

But there needed not only a revelation of God to man, but of man to himself. That, too, we have throughout. We have not only a line of light revealing the Name of God, but a line of darkness marking the sin of man. Side by side with the wonderful story of the creation of man in the image of God, we have the fact of sin

set forth, not in philosophic phrase, but in a living picture, which in its simple way conveys the deepest truths as to sin's insidious approaches, its virulence, and its fatal issues—most marvellous combination of the simplicity of form which was absolutely necessary for the world's childhood, and the profound suggestiveness which is the mark of its high inspiration. And, as the revelation begins, so it proceeds, unveiling the Name of God on the one hand, and the shame of man on the other—the black lines of human sin set in the revealing light of the Sun of Righteousness. There is no respect of persons in the sacred records. The sins of Abraham and of David are painted in all their native hideousness; the sins of the holy nation are as unsparingly exposed as those of the nations who knew not God; and in the New Testament, the sins of erring apostles and disciples are as faithfully recorded as those of the chief priests and scribes. But ever over against the sin of man there is set the righteousness of God, reflected in His law, marked in His judgments, and finally radiant in His Son.

This makes a terrible antithesis, discloses a mighty gulf between God and man, and

raises the great question: How shall man be just with God? The answer to this question is the very core of revelation, namely, THE SALVATION OF GOD, foreshadowed in the earlier history, pictured in the great deliverance from Egypt, and signalized in the Song of Moses, which is echoed and re-echoed by prophet, psalmist, and saint till it becomes in the Apocalypse the Song of Moses and the Lamb: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation" (see especially Exodus xv. 2, Isaiah xii. 2, and Revelation xv. 3). We see, moreover, as we follow the course of revelation, that the salvation must be by Sacrifice. This is foreshadowed in the Paschal lamb and throughout the Jewish ritual, set forth in the suffering Christ of Psalm xxii., Isaiah liii., and other kindred passages, and finds its culmination in the story of the Cross: a line of thought which justifies the great Apostle in giving as the sum and substance of his message, "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

We get thus a very definite subject for the Bible as a whole. The man in the street would say it was a book on religion,

Yet, as a matter of fact, religion is not once mentioned in the Old Testament and scarcely ever in the New. We might indeed say not at all, for while the word occurs in two places (Acts xxvi. 1 and James i. 26, 27), it is not in the wide sense in which we use it, but corresponds rather to our idea of worship or "divine service," while the expression "the Jews' religion" in Galatians i. 13, 14 is in the original simply "Judaism." If then, as so many suppose, the Bible is a book of religion, how comes it to pass that practically the word is never used? What takes its place? The great word "Salvation," which rings through the Bible like a joy-bell from the beginning to the end.

As the result of our inquiry, then, we find that the great themes of the Bible are God, Man, Sin, Righteousness, Salvation, and Sacrifice, and accordingly the main substance of the Bible may be helpfully suggested by the following device which the author of this little book has frequently used in Bible-class work:—



which, being interpreted, means the Salvation of God, for Man, from Sin, to Righteousness, through Christ and Him crucified. All this is summarized in the word "Gospel," which may therefore be given as the great outstanding subject of revelation. For, be it remembered, though the great subjects of God and Man and Sin and Righteousness are all included, these are all dealt with only in relation to the central theme of Salvation. There is no attempt, for example, to give a philosophy of sin or an explanation of its mystery, but only such an exhibition of its hatefulness and horror and ruinous results as to prompt the question, What shall we do to be saved? Nor can we find in Scripture a complete anthropology. There is much indeed to be learned from it on what the Greek philosopher called "The proper study of mankind," namely, Man; but here again we are only to expect those points which stand related to the great Salvation. Even on the doctrine of God, though, as we have seen, the unfolding of the Name of God is one chief object of revelation, yet are we not to expect a complete theology. Rather are we discouraged from the attempt by a question like this:

“Who can by searching find out God?” We often think of the doctrine of the Trinity as among the essentials of the faith; and there are good grounds for seeing in it the only thoroughly rational basis for an intelligent Theism. But even the doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere dogmatically taught in Scripture. It comes in exclusively in its practical bearing, as connected with the great Salvation which is summed up in the benediction: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost”; so it is only in relation to the Gospel that even the doctrine of the Trinity is unfolded in Scripture. Thus, from every point of view, the Gospel of Salvation is the central theme. No candid reader can fail to recognize the palmary position given to the Gospel of Salvation throughout the New Testament. For once that you hear of the Bible or the Scriptures, you hear of Salvation and the Gospel a hundred times. So, too, it is not Preach the Bible, but Preach the Gospel, or Preach the Word, which evidently means the same thing, as in the passage, “To you is the Word of this Salvation sent.” Nor is it Believe the Bible, but Believe the

Gospel. It follows that those who lay all the stress on what are really side-issues, however interesting they may be, are not treating God's revelation according to the purpose for which He gave it. The range is very wide, but the centre should always be, "God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

This central theme of revelation cannot be missed with any honest dealing with the Scripture. There are those who make an extended use of the Bible and yet fail to apprehend the Gospel; but it is by wilfully neglecting that which stands out clear and prominent. Let a man survey the Bible as a whole with any sense of perspective, and the central theme will appear full and clear and unmistakable. The wayfaring man, though a fool, will not err therein. We do not guarantee, however, that the wise man will not err, the man we mean who makes up his mind beforehand what there ought to be in the Bible and what there ought not to be, who therefore will take liberties with it, rule out all that is not easily reconciled with his preconceived ideas, and instead of the Gospel submit some scheme of his own philosophy or

ethics or "religion." One often wonders why our friends who insist on every part of the Bible being equally inspired do not see how they give themselves away in regard to a matter on which happily they are as a rule equally insistent, namely, the duty of giving the Gospel its due place of prominence. On the principle of all parts of Scripture being equally inspired, one might preach on the Bible for fifty years and never once bring the Gospel in. One sees no logical way of countering this unfaithfulness to the sacred Scriptures than by acknowledging in theory as well as in practice the supreme importance of the central theme of the Bible.

It ought surely to be a subject of devout thankfulness that, whatever difficulties may attend outlying and comparatively unimportant subjects, the main substance of revelation stands out so full and clear, quite untouched by the many difficulties raised by modern criticism. One can be quite indifferent as to the question of the canon, or as to the vowel points, or the hundred and fifty thousand errors in transcription which some have reckoned up, or any number of blunders in translation or

uncertainties of any kind. You might take away book after book, every book concerning which there has ever been suggested a reasonable doubt; and enough would remain. Think what a revelation there often is in a single verse, such as John iii. 16. A single Gospel would be a great abundance. How, then, should our hearts swell with gratitude to Him who has given such a large and abundant and satisfying revelation of the Gospel of His grace, dimly foreshadowed, perhaps, in the story of the Fall, but getting clearer and clearer as we come down the ages till it blazes out in Christ, especially in the Cross, as interpreted by the Incarnation on the one side and the Resurrection on the other.

CHAPTER VIII

Verification : Authority and Vision

SOME one may interpose here and say, it may be a fine thing to have a Gospel, or *the* Gospel if you choose, written large in the Scriptures, and made so plain that none can miss it, but how can I be sure of it? Where is my authority? If I have not an assurance that all these Scriptures are so inspired that I can trust every word of them, how can I be sure of the Gospel that is in them?

Here again let us proceed according to our method, which is not to settle in our minds beforehand how the Gospel ought to be verified, but what God has actually done in the way of verification. Now we find when we follow the course of God's dealings with His people that it is not His usual plan to appeal to a written

document for verification of His Gospel. As a rule it is a much more direct appeal to the conscience and heart of man. So was the Gospel preached to Abraham, so was the law given to Moses, and through him to the people. When the prophets were charged with messages from God, there was the same direct appeal to the heart and conscience of the people. So with the preaching of the Gospel in the New Testament. Christ spoke with authority, not as the Scribes, the difference being that He appealed directly to heart and conscience, while their appeal was to the letter of the law. When Pilate asks Him, "What is truth?" He does not refer him to the Old Testament Scriptures, but says, "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." He recognized indeed that though the truth shone by its own light, the hearts of men were dark, often so very dark that they could not see it. In such cases even He could do nothing. His only recourse was to speak in parables, which He knew could not possibly be understood by the people in their present state of mind, but being easily remembered, might recur in a more favourable time and shine with their

own light. See also His answer to the question "Who is this Son of Man" in John xii. 35, 36; His going abruptly away to hide Himself from them; and the remarks made upon it in the passage immediately following. When people were not ready to receive the truth He made no attempt to coerce by external authority. He recognized that the Gospel, even when presented with the greatest clearness and on the highest authority, is of no use without the inward witness: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." When the inward witness is there, it is enough, no other authority is needed: "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me" (John vi. 45). This does not mean that He made nothing of external authority, but that its place was quite subordinate, as shown for example in such an appeal as this: "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the very works' sake." There was verification in the works, a verification not at all to be despised; but the other was far better, the verification from inner vision rather than from authority.

The Apostles proceeded on the same principle. As St. Paul put it: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, . . . by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." He appeals, indeed, to the Scriptures in dealing with the Jews, who denied that Jesus was the Christ, and in controversy with Judaizing Christians he appealed to his calling, and apostleship, and inspiration; but in the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen he evidently expected the truth to come with its own authority.

Authority—External and Internal.

We find, then, that there are two kinds of authority, external and internal; that, while both are useful, the latter is much the more important, and is the only one which is absolutely essential for verification. The former helps towards the truth, but verification is not complete till the truth shines by its own light. Many a one is convinced and saved by the simple appeal of the truth itself. The outward authority may bring within sight of the truth, but it is the inner vision which sees it. That inner vision is faith. And the essence of faith is not a

blind, easy-going assent to the statement of some person or persons regarded as an authority external to our own minds and hearts; it is an energy of mind, and heart, and soul going out to the truth, especially to Him who is the Truth, and accepting it as bringing its own credentials direct from the Father of Lights.

It is of the greatest importance in dealing with this whole subject to remember that God never interferes with human freedom. He never overbears a man's personality. This applies, not only to the subjects of divine inspiration, but to those to whom their message comes. People are never coerced into faith; they must be won to it, by something which appeals to that which is within them. There is never the least suggestion of an infallible authority standing in front of a human soul, and saying, "There are certain things you must believe, whether they appeal to you or not, whether you welcome them or not, whether they awaken any response of conviction or not." There is no such thing as the demand of blind submission; the faith must not be of the nature of soul slumber or enforced mental inactivity; it is not faith at all if it be not free. As

Schopenhauer said : " Faith is like love ; it cannot be forced."

Our Lord Himself insisted very much on the necessary connection of faith and freedom : " Ye shall know the truth," He says, " and the truth shall make you free." And, again, " Ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath not free course in you." " Free course" observe, and that was said to those who believed in the most thorough way in the verbal and literal inspiration of the Scriptures. Their belief was not genuine faith. They were slaves of the letter, and knew nothing of the freedom of the spirit. And so it often is in our own times. If a person is not in sympathy with the truth, he will not find the Gospel in the Scriptures, though he be a believer in the literal inspiration of every word of the Bible. On the other hand, a person who is in sympathy with the truth will surely find it, even though he may have no theory of inspiration, and not even a thought of it. Because he is of the truth, he will hear the Voice Divine, which is the true authority. He will be like the Samaritans, who, encouraged by the testimony of the woman (the external authority), came and saw for themselves (the

inner vision), and said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world." In this instance we see the true relation between the external and the internal authority. The one, the external authority, awakens interest and leads to inquiry; but it is the latter (the inner vision) which is the final verification; the true ground of certainty.

It may be well, before proceeding further, to notice a very common error in regard to the relation of the Protestant Reformation to the question of authority in matters of religion. The supposition is that the reformers simply exchanged one external authority for another, turning from an infallible Church to an infallible Bible as the supreme arbiter. It is an entire mistake. The early reformers certainly gave up the idea of an infallible Church, but what they put in its place was the perpetual presence of Christ Himself with His people, the witness of the Spirit with the word responded to by the Spirit-guided soul. There are those who think that Luther was quite peculiar in the freedom with which he dealt with sacred Scripture. Every one knows

that he condemned the Epistle of James as "an epistle of straw." But every one does not know that Calvin, who may be supposed to represent the more rigid school of the reformers, though less rash in his language, was as far as Luther himself from accepting the rigid theory of inspiration afterwards introduced. He deals with the whole subject in his "Institutes," where he makes it clear that what he sets over against the idea of an infallible Church is the reality of an ever-present Spirit in contact with the minds of the truly devout. "Profane men," he says, "desire and insist to have it proved by reason that Moses and the prophets were divinely inspired. But I answer that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to His own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted. This connection is most aptly expressed by Isaiah in these words, 'My spirit that is

upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.'” And again, “Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.” In the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England there is no theory of inspiration. What is specially declared there is “The sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for salvation.” So, too, the fifth article of the Westminster Confession of Faith, after referring to the value of the testimony of the Church to the Scriptures, and to the evidence of their divine authority to be found in the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, etc. (all appealing to the human power of appreciation), proceeds, “Notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.” Perhaps most distinct of all is the answer

in the larger Catechism to the question, "How doth it appear that the Scriptures are the word of God?" which is: "The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation: but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God." It is also very significant that the Heidelberg Catechism, extending to as many as a hundred and twenty-nine questions, makes no reference whatever to the Scriptures.

From such authoritative documents of the Reformation as these it is abundantly evident that there was no shifting from the external authority of an infallible Church to the equally external authority of an infallible Book,^a but an appeal first to what the Scriptures manifest themselves to be to the devout soul, and next, as the supreme authority, to the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man.

Authority in Life and in Religion.

The subject of authority in religion is a very large one. To understand it thoroughly we would need to consider what a large place authority has in our whole life. We come into the world under the influence of heredity, an influence which does not spring from our own souls, and therefore is of the nature of authority. We grow up under the influence of our environment, which again has potent effect in the making and moulding of us. We are under parental authority during our childhood and early youth, and our whole education is conducted under the authority of our teachers, including the books from which we study as well as the persons from whom we learn our lessons. When we enter on our work in the world, we have a heritage of the past from which it would be as vain as it would be foolish to try to escape. Not a day passes in which we do not take action on the ground of convictions which are not the product of our own minds, but have come to us out of the experience of those who have gone before us. But while we are thus beset before and behind with authority of various kinds and degrees, it is evidently

God's purpose concerning us that we should maintain our freedom, and develop an individuality not crushed by authority but evolved out of it. So it is in the matter of our religious development. The same sets of influences affect us in this department of our life. We come under the influence of external authority of parent, teacher, friend, spiritual adviser ; but as we grow up we are more and more called to exercise our freedom.

There are many who think it dangerous in matters of religion to leave anything to the freedom of the individual soul. How can we trust it? they say. The heart is deceitful above all things ; what room is there for the assertion of its freedom? What we want is an authority quite independent of the human soul, which does not ask its assent, but compels it ; which settles everything for it, and does not expose it to the danger of settling anything for itself.

But a very little consideration will show how utterly futile is this position. There are always competing claims for our allegiance, and how are these to be settled? Take three typical cases as illustrations.

(1) The Romanist finds rest in his faith

in an infallible Church, but before finding it he must accept his Church as infallible. Surely that is an exercise of freedom, if it is anything. Is there not the least danger of his being wrong in that acceptance? Is not the ultimate authority in his case the validity of the act of his soul by which he accepts the Church of Rome as an infallible guide?

(2) The same principle is applicable to those who find rest in the conviction that they have in their possession a book, every line and word of which is beyond the reach of error. But how has the man reached that conviction? Is it by his own investigation? Then how can he be sure that he has not made some mistake? Or is it because he has been so taught from his youth? Then is his ultimate authority not a whit better than that of the Romanist who believes in the infallibility of his Church. And it is evident that whatever reason he gives for accepting the infallibility of the Bible, the ultimate appeal is to his own judgment in so accepting it, which is surely anything but an infallible authority. We cannot by any jugglery of logic get away from the difficulty of personal responsibility

in accepting or rejecting the truth. If our acceptance is blind, it is of course worthless. If it is founded on reason, then it shares the uncertainty attaching to all human reasoning. Seeing then that it is quite impossible to escape the exercise of personal judgment in the acceptance of the truth, why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should lay upon us the responsibility of recognizing His Gospel as it shines forth in the pages of the Bible?

(3) Take the case of a person who has not been able to find sufficient evidence that any Church is infallible, and moreover has not been able to find sufficient evidence that every line of the Bible is inspired. He finds, however, a claim of inspiration on the part of certain prophets and apostles, and especially on the part of Him to whom all the prophets and apostles bear witness. He reads their utterances humbly, reverently, and expectantly, and as he reads, a light above the brightness of the sun flashes in upon him, a voice which he cannot but recognize as truly divine speaks to his soul, searches his heart, elevates his affections, exercises a purifying effect on his life; as he continues to read there rises before the

faith of his soul a living Friend, with whom he comes into conscious touch, with whom he grows into the acquaintance of trust and love, until he can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him." Is that man leaning more on his own understanding, and trusting less to divine guidance than if he had previously reasoned himself into the belief in an infallible Church or an infallible Bible? If you ask him what is his ultimate and supreme authority, he will point you not to a Church, nor to a Book, but to the living Christ whose Spirit guides him into the truth. It is true that his ultimate authority does not reach him through the eye as in the case of the man who finds it in the Book, nor through the ear as in the case of the man who finds it in the priest speaking in the name of the Church; but is the witness of the invisible Spirit of God in direct contact with his spirit to be treated as a thing of nought, because there is in his case no external authority on which to lean?

There is no verification possible, apart from the acceptance by the human spirit of

the divine message, the response of the soul to the claim made on its allegiance. And though there is, from the nature of the case, a measure of uncertainty in the conviction which arises out of the response of the spirit to the voice of God in the utterances of prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself, it can surely be no greater than in that which arises from the response of the soul to the claim made upon it by an infallible Church or an infallible Book.

Authority—Ultimate and Proximate.

If we think the matter out with any care, we shall find that God's method is the only one which conserves human freedom. The truth, whatever it be, whether it be identified with the Church, or the Bible, or the Gospel of Christ Himself, must in the last resort appeal to the conscience and heart of man. External authority—of which there is abundance, as we have already seen, running along the whole course of divine revelation—may bring a man face to face with the truth, but only the vision of the mind and the embrace of the heart can make it his own.

This may seem very unsatisfactory to those who have been accustomed to call

for some outward authority as the last resort; but surely it is more humble and reverent and loyal to accept the fundamental position of our Lord Himself, when He said, on the subject of verification, "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice."

It is only fair to acknowledge that the great majority of those who seem to found their faith on the theory of verbal inspiration have in reality a far better and stronger foundation on which to rest. They, too, have an experience as rich and satisfactory as any. Being of the truth, they hear the divine voice in the Scriptures; they see visions of God, and have the happy consciousness of the presence with them of the unseen Friend, and the witness of His Spirit in their hearts. It is this unquestionable experience which makes their faith so clear and strong and constant; and it is their sense of the preciousness and the certain validity of this experience which makes them so sensitive to any suggestions of doubt as to what they suppose to be the foundation of their faith. But if they would only consider carefully what is the real ground of their confidence, they would find it was not the external authority, but

the appeal of the voice of Christ and the truth of God to all that is noblest and best in their renewed natures. If they realized this, they would cease to be troubled with questions which touch only the external authority, and are completely irrelevant to that which affects the living issue.

The case of these brethren, among whom are found many of earth's noblest, and of the devoutest and most self-denying of Christians, has been once for all set forth in the illustration given by the late Dr. Dale, where he tells of the sore troubles in Carr's Lane Church by the discovery that two large pillars had to be removed in order to afford space for an organ. There were elaborate calculations as to how the lost support could be made up in other ways, and at last a way was found by which it was thought they could be safely removed. And when the work began, and the pillars were dealt with, it was found that they did not go to the bottom, and therefore only seemed to be pillars, and that instead of supporting the beam they were hung from it. This is an exact parallel to the case of those who have really an immovable foundation for their faith, while they trust

to the seeming pillars of a human theory of inspiration and authority. Their theory of inspiration, instead of supporting their faith in Christ, as they suppose, is really supported by it. There is one difference, however, that in Carr's Lane the pillars did not weaken the structure. In this case they do, for there are tens of thousands of people who have been so brought up in the belief that everything turns on the absolute inerrancy of every word of Scripture, that when any question arises, not in regard to the substance or the spirit, the object or effect of the whole, but as to some matter of small detail, they at once suppose that everything is lost; and not having seen the vision or heard the voice as the others have, they reject the Bible as if it were waste paper, and give up the Church of God as a discredited relic of the past. They would have had no excuse for this had they not been led to build on the sand of theory instead of the rock of Truth.

Let it be remembered, however, that while the one supreme authority is Christ Himself, speaking by His Spirit not only through "holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," but also

directly to the souls of those who truly seek Him, we are not at all justified in discarding other authorities because they are not supreme. It would be the very height of pride and self-sufficiency for any man to say to himself, Christ is my only teacher, therefore I will not listen to any one else, but build up my spiritual life on direct visions of Him and voices from Him to my own soul. It is the disposition to look at things too much in this way that vitiates the great argument of Martineau on "The Seat of Authority." Finding as he does the ultimate seat of authority in the voice of God as responded to by the human heart and conscience, he assumes a position which practically sets aside as worthless the witness of prophets and apostles, and the accumulated experience and witness of the Church. As we have seen, it would be madness in ordinary life to cut ourselves off from the past, and it is equally foolish to attempt it in the life of faith. Though we do not find our supreme authority even in the holiest men of old, or in any body of men claiming to be the Church, we by no means discard the authority which properly belongs to them. We have already seen

abundant evidence, and shall see more before we have done, that God did indeed speak to the fathers by the prophets, and has in these last days spoken to us in His Son ; and to discard the authority of these utterances because we have not the guarantee that every line of the books in which they come to us is guarded against the possibility of error, is wilfully to reject the revelation which God has given us, and on which alone our fellowship with Him is based ; and to pay no regard whatever to what the Spirit has said to the Churches in time past would be to cut ourselves off from all the guidance and inspiration which has come through an innumerable cloud of witnesses. There is no infallible Church ; but that does not mean that we deny the presence of the Spirit with His people all through the chequered history of the Church, and though we see no grounds for believing that God has wrought a continual miracle for the purpose of preserving from all possible error every line and word of the Bible, that is no reason for calling in question the unique authority with which the utterances of Prophets and Apostles and the records of the Evangelists have come to us.

There will, no doubt, be those who cannot

help thinking it a serious loss to give up the idea of a document so carefully drawn up as to be in itself a complete and sufficient authority, like an Act of Parliament in which the effect of every word and comma has been minutely considered beforehand, so as to leave nothing to doubtful disputation. What a comfort it would be! We should need no interpreter, no light from above, there would be an end of all controversy, for *litera scripta manet*, while visions and voices and inspiration—are they not all so fugitive and so unreal? But have Acts of Parliament proved so very satisfactory? Have we never heard of the proverbial coach-and-six? And if it is proved by experience to be impossible with the aid of the most accomplished parliamentary draughtsmen and lawyers, to construct in such a way as to leave no loophole for evasion, an Act of, say, twenty pages, dealing with a subject of quite limited scope and application, can it be supposed possible to have a heavenly Act of Parliament extending to a thousand pages and dealing with a thousand and one difficult questions, constructed in such a way as to be sufficient in itself for all purposes?

Verily we cannot do without something above the written word, without the presence and guidance of the Spirit of Him who spake to the fathers by the prophets. There must be present inspiration to verify for us, and to enable us to make use of the inspiration that is past. Do we not believe in the Holy Ghost? Do we wish to do without Him? Let us then, instead of finding fault with the divine method as unsatisfactory, gratefully accept it, and let us with adoring gratitude rejoice that "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." There is the final verification. There is the ultimate authority—the Holy Spirit of God and of His Son Jesus Christ speaking, in the sacred Scriptures especially, to the consciences and hearts of those who are of the truth.

CHAPTER IX

The Way of Certainty

AT the close of the last chapter we referred to the dissatisfaction often expressed with the view there presented, on the ground that it seems to give up the hope of certainty promised both by an infallible Church and an infallible Bible. It is fully admitted that there may be subjective certainty, personal assurance of the truth of the gospel, but the difficulty felt is that the certainty is not of such a kind as to be set before others; while what is wanted is an objective authority to which there can readily be a universal appeal. It may be well, therefore, before proceeding further, to follow our usual method in regard to this point—that is, instead of settling in our own minds what God ought to have done or might be expected to have done to meet this craving of the human heart, to find out

what He has actually done. This will take us in part over the ground we have traversed, but the matter is so important that we need not hesitate to deal with it in another connection, which will present it in a more concrete and illustrative way.

Let it be observed, in the first place, that there is no encouragement given in Scripture to expect any such revelation of truth as will dispense with earnest inquiry. We are continually reminded throughout the Old Testament that we must seek the Lord, seek Him with the whole heart, must search for wisdom as for hid treasure; our Lord urged the same duty with still greater force, telling us that we must ask, seek, knock, must strive to enter into the strait gate, must labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, that the kingdom is like treasure hid in a field, and, again, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force"; and the Apostles in like manner call upon us to "prove all things and hold fast that which is good," to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God." From the general tone and tenour of Scripture, therefore, we would draw the conclusion that while the craving for

certainty is in itself quite natural and proper, yet when it takes the form of a demand for some external authority to settle everything for us without any thought or effort of our own, it becomes morbid and utterly misleading. This appears continually in the case of those who in recent times have left the Anglican for the Roman Church. It is seen with startling distinctness in the letters of Cardinal Manning, and it is no less marked in the "Apologia" of John Henry Newman. Both of them assume all through that certainty is impossible unless there be an infallible authority to settle all questions as they arise by word of mouth or stroke of pen. The Scriptures were sufficient for their time, but what are the people of this late age of the world to do without an infallible authority to answer their questions? The Holy Spirit indeed still lives,* but where is He, and how is His voice to be uttered? It is not enough that He is infallible Himself, He must have an infallible mouthpiece, and what can that be but the Church of Rome, and the Pope who speaks in its name? How simple and clear it all is now! an infallible Church speaking through an infallible Pope—no more doubts or fears, no more difficulties,

no more need to search and see for ourselves ; it is all done for us, and we need have no more trouble ; all the faithful may now, as the Cardinal expresses it in one of his letters, "lay down their weary reason by the still waters of refreshment." Now the question is, Is it indeed the divine will that in order to attain certainty in regard to the truth as it is in Jesus, we are to lay down our weary reason beside the still waters of submission to an infallible fellow-mortal ? Or is there a more excellent way ?

We have spoken of the general drift and tenour of the Scriptures ; but there happens to be one particular passage in which we are permitted to see the true method of reaching the desired certainty. It is the introduction to St. Luke's Gospel, where the Evangelist states, as his object in writing to Theophilus, "that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." Let us then inquire what means he employed for the purpose.

Notice, at the outset, that the inspired Evangelist had no expectation that Christian disciples would have certainty to start with. Theophilus had already been under instruction which evidently covered the wide range

of the life and teaching of Christ in the days of His earthly ministry; yet he still needed to be led on to certainty.

This does not imply any uncertainty in his experience. As soon as his heart was opened to the Lord Jesus, he would become acquainted with Him, and would have the experience of the light of the new life. But it would be only a point of light to start with, only the beginning of a course of instruction in divine things. As the circle enlarged, new questions would arise; new difficulties; doubts, possibly, in regard to some things; dim conceptions needing to be cleared; and, in this way, it would come to pass that, even after years of instruction, he would still feel the need of such help as the Evangelist Luke undertook to give him.

Let it be observed that this point has its application to many at the very opposite pole from our Roman Catholic friends. Extremes meet; and so there are those who excuse their neglect of religion altogether on the ground that they cannot have perfect certainty to begin with, in regard to the whole round of Christian doctrine. They have their difficulties about miracles, about the future life, about the course of nature,

and the providence of God ; and, because their Christian friends cannot clear these all up to them, in the space of ten minutes or half an hour, they will not listen to anything our Lord and Master has to say. Now, no one denies, no thoughtful person can deny, that, in the doctrines of Christianity, touching, as they do, on every side the hardest subjects on which the mind of man can exercise itself, there are many and great difficulties. What then ? Is it reasonable to insist that the whole round of Christian truth should lie in the clear light of knowledge and certainty to the mere beginner ? What should we think of a person who refused to begin the study of elementary geometry and algebra, because he could not see through the intricacies of the integral and differential calculus ? Yet there are thousands who decline to enter the school of Christ, for reasons of precisely the same kind. All that is asked is, to turn from all that conscience tells them is sin, and open their hearts to God that He may let His light shine in upon them as they read the Scriptures or hear the gospel, and keep them open to Him that more and more light may shine day by day ; and when, in the course of

their training, they come to places where they meet with serious difficulty, they will, no doubt, find some such help as that which was ready for Theophilus when he needed it—making clear what formerly was dark, and helping onwards towards that certainty, in regard to the full-orbed truth of God, which is to be the goal, not the starting point, of our race. What is asked of them is, not that they give their assent to any ready-made creed, but that they humble themselves before God, take their place in the school of Christ, as beginners, and be content to learn by degrees, as He will teach them.

So much for the negative part of our subject : certainty is not waiting for us ready made at the start ; it must be attained, and the question is, How ? By what means ? Is there any hint given to Theophilus of the suppression of his faculties being needed, or their coercion by sheer authority ? The writer has not the smallest doubt that the Evangelist Luke wrote this gospel as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, and that, therefore, it is an authoritative presentation of the truth in Jesus ; but mark well that St. Luke does not say one word about this, or even give the slightest hint of it. He

does not say, These other teachers to whom you have been listening are not infallible, but I am so; you must believe what I say on peril of your salvation. Not a trace of this. He refers to many others who have taken in hand to tell the Gospel story. There must have been some of these attempts, which, however well meant and well done, never found their way into the canon of Scripture. Our Fourth Gospel could not have been among them, for it was considerably later; and if Matthew and Mark were, they could only have been two of the "many" to whom he refers. Yet, observe, he does not distinguish among those who have taken the work in hand, nor does he discredit any of the rest in his own favour; and when he speaks of the qualifications he has for the task, what does he specify? Is there anything about his being specially appointed to give an *ex cathedrâ* utterance? Not a word of it. Here are the claims he makes on his own behalf: that he has given much attention to the subject, that he has been careful to be accurate in verifying his facts, and that he makes a special effort to be orderly in the presentation of them. Not only so, but he even avoids any such

phrase as is common enough among good people of our day who have no claim to special inspiration. He does not say, "The Spirit moved me to write this to you"; or, "I have been led to write this Gospel"; he does not even go to the length of saying, "It has been borne in upon me that I should write this to you;" he simply says, "It seemed good to me also."

Does all this lessen reasonable faith in his inspiration? On the contrary, it increases it. It is your uninspired men and Churches who wish to compel faith by mere authority. Instead of taking the claim of infallibility as the note of the true Church, as Newman and Manning did, and their followers do, we recognize in it a mark of its departure from the simplicity and purity of the early days. If only these good men had given less attention to the mediæval fathers and more to the Holy Scriptures, they would have seen that the absence of such claims was much more in accord with real inspiration.

But it may be suggested that the absence of the claim to infallibility on the part of the Evangelist was simply due to his modesty. Well, no doubt St. Luke was an exceedingly modest man, and that is the reason why he

never mentions his own name, either here or in the Acts of the Apostles, but always hides himself behind his subject. Is not that a modesty well worthy of imitation? If only the Roman Church would cease to hide Christ behind itself, and begin to hide itself behind Christ, as all the Evangelists did, what a glorious Reformation there would be!

But there was more than modesty in Luke's suppression of all claim to speak with the authority of divine inspiration. It was part of his inspiration, guarding him against deviating from the divine method of dealing with human souls. Education, not dictation, is the divine method. Every intelligent reader of the Scriptures now recognizes the truth of what Lessing first distinctly taught—that the Old Testament is the record of the divine education of Israel. And to come closer home, look at Christ's training of the Twelve. Is there any sign of the imposing on their minds by mere authority of a fully developed creed? He lays down duties with authority, as in the Sermon on the Mount; but not doctrines. Take, as a palmary illustration, the doctrine of His divinity. Can we discover any attempt to impose it on them by authority?

On the contrary, He deliberately withholds it till they discover it for themselves. "Come and see" is one of His earliest utterances to His disciples. So He waits until they see it for themselves. He hears them say to one another, "What manner of man is this!" and we do not find Him answering, "You are mistaken in thinking of Me as a man merely; I am the Son of God, and you must believe it." Nothing of the sort. He waits until they see it. And not until He has some reason to believe that they have caught sight of the great truth for themselves—though it took them nearly three years to get that length—not till then does He begin to draw them out by asking, as He did at Cæsarea Philippi, "Whom do ye say that I am?" And if we will think at all carefully on the subject, we shall see that truth imposed by mere authority is of no use; it must be welcomed by the spiritual nature, taken into its substance, assimilated by thought and feeling, before it can do its proper work.

The work of the Spirit was to be conducted in the same way. "He shall guide you into all truth"—a process of education still, in which the faculties are to be fully

employed about the truth till it becomes luminous and full-orbed, shining with its own light, and so giving that certainty for which we rightly crave, and which is a great and blessed attainment when reached in the proper way, so clearly marked out for us in the Scriptures of truth.

“There is no royal road to learning.” There is no short cut to certainty. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.” “I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” We cannot dispense with the use of the faculties with which our Creator has endowed us. We must search the Scriptures, according to the word of Christ. We must prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good, according to the word of St. Paul. We must not believe every spirit, as the Apostle John puts it, but prove the spirits whether they are of God. We must return from all wanderings to Christ, whom the Apostle Peter calls “the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.” Yes, we have an infallible Guide, but He is no poor, frail, erring creature like you or me, or the Pope of Rome. We have Christ Himself, “the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls,” who

has promised never to fail us nor forsake us. We have the Holy Spirit, to come and take possession of our hearts, to quicken, not to deaden, all our faculties, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And, as the Apostle John puts it, "The anointing which we received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as His anointing teacheth you all things and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, abide in Him." What a distinct warning against those who seek infallibility in man! Assurance, *i.e.* certainty, is the keynote of the Epistle, and here the Apostle of Certainty distinctly points us to the Spirit of God as the only and all-sufficient Guide. "Ye need not that any one teach you." What does that mean? It cannot mean that all teaching is to stop, that churches are to be closed, Sunday Schools shut, books burned, even Bibles destroyed, and nothing left but the voice of the Holy Spirit in the heart. It means that there is no authoritative teacher except the Holy Spirit; it means that if we want infallibility we must not seek it in man, but in God alone; and if we ask how it is to be conveyed to us, it is by that anointing,

as he calls it, which abides in the recesses of the soul.

We must certainly use all the means of grace, especially the reading of the sacred Scriptures; for that was the means on which the Evangelist Luke relied. Theophilus would need the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit, but that did not dispense with the necessity of carefully reading this Gospel. We see, then, how clear and distinct is the answer of the Scripture to the question with which we started. We cannot expect certainty in regard to every word of the Bible and the whole circle of divine truth to start with; but we may expect in due time to attain to the full-orbed truth of God in Christ through the reading of the sacred Scriptures under the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

PART III

*INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF
THE RECORD*

CHAPTER X

Introductory

WE have, in a certain sense, reached our goal. We have had an inspired people, a prophet nation, called of God to receive from Him and to transmit to us a revelation of Himself and of the Gospel of salvation which shines out in their literature, and culminates in the wonderful story of the Redeemer of the world ; and we have all this coming to us, not as a mere story of the past, but as an authentic revelation of God, valid here and now—His voice heard, His presence felt, the power of His salvation known to those who open mind and heart to the great unveiling. Already we have had good reason to be assured, to use the words of the sixth of the Thirty-Nine Articles, “of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for salvation.”

But it may be said, the gospel is only

a line of light running through the Scriptures. Are we to restrict their inspiration and authority to that one line? Are not the Scriptures, as a whole, inspired by God, and invested with divine authority? If so, must we not claim that complete exemption from human frailty and liability to error which seems involved in the idea of divine authority? It is to this part of the subject we must now address ourselves, namely, the inspiration and authority of the record of divine revelation in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

Here again we believe that if we faithfully follow our method of not settling in our mind what ought to be, but finding out what is, we shall have reason to wonder and adore, as we see how our Father in heaven has secured for us all the blessings of inspired guidance under conditions which seemed almost to preclude the possibility of it. We shall find that He has made the very most of the materials with which alone it was possible for Him to work, with the result that though the treasure is in earthen vessels, which serve as a foil to set off its incomparable value, the very vessels themselves, earthen as they are, and must of

necessity be, are such that there too we cannot but recognize the divine workmanship. We shall see further that, though we cannot claim perfection for any of the organs or vehicles of inspiration, save for Him to whom they all bear converging witness, the result of the whole, as seen in our completed Bible, may be said to be perfect—not as literature, nor as art, nor as history, nor (least of all) as science—but as adapted to the accomplishment of its end, perfect in the sense suggested by the Psalmist when he says: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”] To see the marvel of all this it will be necessary first to take into somewhat careful consideration the necessary limitations of inspiration under the conditions of its exercise.

CHAPTER XI

Necessary Limitations—"Earthen Vessels"

IT is important at the outset to remember that the most consummate artist is limited by the nature of his material. He may have thoughts and inspirations far above and beyond what he can express in black-and-white or in colours, in marble or in bronze, in speech or in song; but, however perfect his idea may be, it must, in finding expression, share the imperfections of the forms in which he works. If this very obvious fact had only been kept in mind, most of the difficulties which beset the subject of inspiration need never have arisen.

There are some people who find it difficult, or as it would seem almost impossible, to realize that God, the omnipotent, all-perfect One, should have been under similar limitations in the giving of His revelation

to the human race. They suppose that with His limitless resources He would surely have found it easy to give a perfect revelation to the most imperfect people. But have these friends ever in seriousness raised the question how it could have been done? Let us take some of the common suppositions.

Let us suppose it possible that a document could be constructed in heaven which would have been a perfect revelation of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, desirable for man to know on all the subjects which concern him here and hereafter. What mortal could have read it? For it must have been in a perfect language; and there never has been any such language upon earth, so it must have been in an unknown tongue. And even if that difficulty had been overcome, which of the sons of men would have been capable of seeing and understanding and appreciating the authentic product of heaven's high literature? There would need to have been not only a miraculously constructed book, but a miraculously reconstructed humanity to take it in; and wherein would that have been different from the annihilation of the

human race as it is, and the creating of another? It would not have been the salvation of man; it would have been the sweeping of him out of existence, and the bringing into being of a new race entirely different from the old.

Again, let us suppose it possible that He could have sent an angel from heaven, or a whole army of angels, fully inspired with heavenly truth, to go forth as missionaries and make known the heavenly revelation to all sorts and conditions of men. But, once again, what language would they use? As soon as they employed any language under the sun, that moment would their message be involved in the imperfections—crudities, barbarisms, inconsistencies, obscurities, and what not—inseparable from the very best of earth's languages. And, if it be supposed that it might be possible for them to supplement the words they spoke by the lives they lived, would they not be out of touch with us, and would it not be quite impossible for us to enter into lives so wholly diverse in nature and in circumstance from ours? And, if they came upon us with the impact of superhuman power, would not human freedom be abolished?

It has been a not uncommon rhetorical device, in speaking of the gospel as coming to us through human agency, to say that God might have spoken to us with a voice from heaven, or He might have written His gospel in letters of light on the sky, or He might have sent a legion of angels to tell it all abroad; but He has, in His condescending goodness, set these other methods aside and employed the agency of man. But will such flights of rhetoric bear any examination? Try to think the alternatives out. Imagine the writing on the sky; imagine the voice or succession of voices from an open heaven; imagine the legion of angels setting to work—is there one of the inherent difficulties of the case really met? What really stands in the way of salvation is sin. And it is not so very easy a matter to take away the sin of the world, to give eternal life to dying men!

The more we apply our minds to think out the mighty problem of the divine revelation to a sinful race, the more clearly shall we see that God's method is, if not the only one, most certainly the best; always on the supposition that human freedom is not to be interfered with.

Setting aside, then, other suggested alternatives, let us look at the method which God actually followed, and consider some of the limitations from which there could be no escape.

(1) If man's free agency is to be respected, he must be reached, not by an intrusive force from without, but by the usual methods of influence and persuasion by which the will is reached without coercion. Hence the need of human agency. And the agency must not only be human, but must remain human. To take an ordinary man and by divine *fiat* to transform him into an angel or some perfect creature quite unlike what he was, would be practically to surrender human ministration, and fall back on what would be, to all intents and purposes, preternatural agency. There is an influence of the divine Spirit upon the human spirit, which lies within the range of what is natural, and whenever we have the opportunity of following the training which made a prophet or an apostle of the originally ordinary man, we can see by what gradual and sometimes painful processes the result was reached. We think of Moses and all

that he went through before he could become the leader of the people ; of Elijah and his trials and temptations ; of Hosea and the sad story of his domestic life ; of Jeremiah and the sore suffering, and still sorer soul-conflicts by which he became the most Christ-like of all the prophets. So too the Apostles—think of the long course of training they had ; compare Peter and John of the early days with the men they had become when they wrote their epistles : they are new men, but not by a divine *fiat*, not by a sudden miracle of transformation, simply by the training of Christ and His Spirit in ways which never interfered with the freedom of their will, or the natural evolution of their manhood, under the gracious influence of which they were the subjects. It might, perhaps, be thought that the case of the Apostle Paul was an exception. Was not he miraculously changed from one being to another in that flash of light from heaven, and may that not be taken as an illustration of how God not only could, but did, in a moment and simply by the exercise of divine power, undo one man, the old Saul, and create a new one, the new Paul ? Is not that what Paul himself felt when he wrote

of being in Christ, as a "new creation"? But when we look more closely into his case, we find that it was no real exception to the rule. There was, indeed, a sudden change from darkness to light, but we must not forget his presence some time before at the martyrdom of Stephen, and the impression which would be made upon him by what he there saw and heard; nor must we forget the opportunity he would have on the long journey North to review his past, and to raise the great question of his life; and, moreover, while there was, as so often happens, a quite sudden conversion, there was no suddenness in his appointment to the position of apostle. He had not only to put himself under the guidance of Ananias, and in communication with the brethren at Jerusalem, but to spend three years in the desert. Even in his case, therefore, there is no evidence of such a miraculous influence upon him as would lift him above the possibility of error. That he was an inspired man thereafter there can be no manner of doubt, and that his inspiration was far more than what we call the ordinary guidance of the Spirit; but even in his case it was not such as to interfere with the natural working of mind and heart, and

reduce him to a mere organ of another's inspiration. We conclude, therefore, that while there was special guidance of the Spirit for the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New, its action was not in superseding their own powers, but rather in directing and quickening them; it was never such as to change them suddenly from imperfection to perfection. This would have been to exceed the necessary limitations in two ways, first by coercing the will, and next by changing the man into a superman—a virtual abandonment of genuine human agency.

(2) Another necessary limitation was the use of human language, and of such language, however undeveloped, as there was to be had at the time. The Hebrew tongue was probably quite as good as any of the earlier languages of the world. There is a simplicity, directness, and impressiveness about it which made it in some degree suitable as a vehicle of revelation in its earlier stages; but it was certainly crude, and very limited in its scope. The Greek language was the most perfect vehicle of thought in existence at the time the New

Testament was produced ; but even the best of Greek was quite inadequate for giving perfect expression to the things of God. New words had to be introduced, old ones transfigured, and some lifted out of the mud in which they had long lain to be minted and coined anew. The inadequacy of vocabulary is only a small part of the case. All who have studied the science of language know that it is a great mistake to suppose that there can be any real precision in expressing even the most familiar thoughts in the region of the intellect, and that it is only by way of suggestion that the unseen and eternal can be presented at all. We use, for example, such simple and common words as "faith" and "love" as if they had a definite and precise meaning ; whereas if we could analyze the ideas awakened in the minds of different people, we should find scarcely two of them in which they completely corresponded.

One thinks here of the classic passage in "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," showing that there are at least six distinct personalities to be recognized as taking part in the dialogue between John and Thomas : "The real John, known only to his Maker ;

John's ideal John, never the real John, and often very unlike him; Thomas' ideal John, never the real John, nor John's John, and often very unlike either"; and the three Thomases in like manner. In the same way, it would be very interesting, and most instructive too, if we could follow some controversy, say on "faith," or on "the Atonement," and discover in how many senses the same word was used by different persons. We should probably find nearer thirty "faiths" than three, and as many as fifty different "atonements." The human mind being what it is, there is endless room for misunderstanding; and language, being one of its products, cannot rise above its source. It follows, therefore, that there is a necessary limitation with respect to the giving of revelation in the impossibility, from the nature of the case, of finding a better vehicle for it than any of the languages of man. And while all this applies to spoken language, it is still more marked as applied to written language, which is destitute of the tones and inflections that help us so much in our ordinary speech.

(3) The limitations of literary form. Here

again it is quite possible to conceive of God so lifting men out of the environment of their time as to enable them to make use of the very best and most accurate forms of literature, even such as in the natural course were not developed till thousands of years later. Even these would have had their own imperfections ; besides, in order to reach that higher stage of literary form, it is plain that such a miracle would have been required as to unman a man, to deprive him of his human nature and make him a super-human automaton. No free will could have been left to him after such treatment.

But apart from this, is it not evident that there has been no imposing of a special literary form on the inspired writers? Each takes his own, and of course it is a form current in his own times. It was "at sundry times and in divers manners" that the different portions of the Bible came into existence ; and it is one of the most interesting things about the Bible that there is scarcely any form of literary production which does not find its place there. The literary forms of the world in use at the different times are taken just as they are ; only they are lifted, as it were, above themselves, and, without

any violation of their proper nature, made vehicles of the most marvellous inspiration.

The first form which is found in the history of the world's literature is that of myth and legend. Now, there are those in our day who think that God must have found it quite impossible to make any use of that kind of literature. But why? From this unworthy and unwarrantable limitation of the grace and power of God have sprung many of the most serious difficulties as to the inspiration of the Scriptures—difficulties which are all swept away as soon as we recognize that just as God will graciously use the most imperfect languages—languages which have not even a word that will stand for God in them, languages like those of Patagonia and Northern Australia, reflecting the condition of people who have scarcely a thought above the daily wants of the body and the most elementary passions of the soul—for conveying whatever is possible of the truth; so he would use forms of literature, however inadequate, rather than let the people go without any enlightenment at all. If we would only think ourselves back to the conditions of the olden time, so far from finding fault or suggesting difficulty, we should recognize the marvellous

grace of God in so lifting up the best legendary literature of the world as to make it a vehicle of high and pure revelation. How impressive it is, for example, to compare the story of the garden of Eden or of the Fall with the uninspired legends of other nations, which are tissues for the most part of meaningless absurdities, sometimes of abominations, while the Bible stories are filled full, as full as such forms of literature could be imagined to be, of the noblest spiritual teaching! What an exhilarating change to those of us who once were harassed by the old difficulties, and worried with the fruitless and foolish controversies about them, to get a view of the glorious heaven which, unclouded by any of them, overarches all! That which on the old view told so heavily against the inspiration of the Bible, tells powerfully in its favour now. It is a fresh witness to the reality and efficacy of that touch upon the spirits of holy men of old which, without interfering with their freedom or overbearing their human nature, enabled them to give us light in the darkness, the rainbow in the cloud—all of the truth which was communicable through the only vehicle then available for use.

At the best the treasure must be in earthen

vessels, and the farther back we go, the more earthen may we expect the vessel to be; and this will, of course, apply in a very special manner to the time when myth and legend held the field; but surely, instead of making this a ground of complaint, or of unworthy criticism, we should rather adore the wisdom and grace of God that He could and did put the treasure into any vessel, however earthen, which was available; and do we not in this see further evidence that the excellency of the power was not of man, but of God? But this is of such commanding importance that we must give it a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XII

The Excellency of the Power

IT is encouraging to the writer, on referring to the quotation just made (2 Corinthians iv. 7), to find that he has been unconsciously following the order of the Apostle's thought in the passage which leads up to that quotation. If we turn to the chapter we shall find that he begins by speaking of the truth, which he is called, as a minister of Christ, to commend to every man's conscience in the sight of God (vers. 1, 2). This truth he identifies with the Gospel (ver. 3); and in view of its being hid from those who believe not, he cites as the explanation of this, not any uncertainty due to the lack of external authority, but blindness of mind (ver. 4), and appeals for the verification of his Gospel, not to external supports, refusing even to press upon them his own personal or official authority (ver. 5), but to the

self-evidencing power of the truth—the shining of the light of the Gospel as verified in Christian experience (ver. 6). Then follows the acknowledgment that this “treasure” (“the word of God,” “the truth,” “our Gospel,” “the glorious Gospel of Christ,” “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”—all equivalent expressions already used) is in “earthen vessels”; but instead of this being in his view any disparagement or disappointment, the only effect it has on his mind is to give assurance that the excellency of the power must be of God.

It is a mere commonplace now that this excellency of power has been found, is always to be found, in these sacred Scriptures. It is now more than two millenniums since that Psalm was written in which the sacred oracles of the Hebrews, then scanty and incomplete, were represented as “converting the soul,” “making wise the simple,” “re-joicing the heart,” “enlightening the eyes.” And has not the claim been abundantly justified through all the centuries and to the ends of the earth? In other sacred books and in the writings of ancient sages we find passages that would not be disgraced

by comparison with what is here—passages of rarest beauty, of loftiest tone, of spiritual discernment even ; but everywhere else we miss the excellency of the power.

There is a dynamic here which we discover nowhere else, and that dynamic lies in the Gospel of God, the treasure hid in these earthen vessels. The Chinese preacher, familiar with the writings of Confucius and the faith of Buddha, well caught this special characteristic of the Gospel. He represented a sinner lying in a deep pit, unable to extricate himself from its mire. Confucius came to the edge of the pit, and said, "Poor fellow, I am very sorry for you. Why were you such a fool as to get in there ? Let me give you a piece of advice ; if you get out, don't get in again." A Buddhist priest next came by, and said, "Poor fellow ! I am very much pained to see you there. I think if you could scramble up two-thirds of the way, or even half, I could reach you and lift you up the rest." But the man in the pit could not get out of the mire. Then the Saviour came by, and took him from the horrible pit and from the miry clay and set his feet upon a rock, and put a new song in his mouth.

This is the power which makes the Bible unique. It is to this that prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself make special appeal. Jeremiah writes: "Is not My word like as fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" So the Apostle Peter speaks of "The word of God which liveth and abideth for ever"; and in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "The word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." In the same way our Lord, finding fault with the pedantic literalism of the Jews, said: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life."

The ethical and religious productions of those who made their researches and recorded the results of them apart from the Scriptures—where are they? Where, for example, are the moralists and philosophers of Greece and Rome? Their works, indeed, are on the shelves of every scholar in Christendom; but in what capacity? As authorities? Not at all; simply as monuments

of genius and chapters of intellectual history. Who would ever think, when considering the question, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" of answering it by saying, "By taking heed thereto according to Aristotle's 'Nicomachian Ethics'!" Yet Aristotle's "Nicomachian Ethics" is perhaps the very best book ever produced on the subject without aid from revelation. Who would ever think of expecting a soul-satisfying solution to the problem, "If a man die, shall he live again?" in the "Phædo" of Plato, unrivalled as it is among the literature of antiquity on the subject of the soul's immortality? Is there a single Greek or Roman classic on the subject of man's condition and prospects that would be of the slightest use to a soul burdened with sin, or pressed with the weight of this most solemn of all questions: "How shall a man be just with God?" They are all out of date—cold monuments of genius, dead relics of antiquity, almost forgotten attempts to sound the mysteries of life and death.

Or again, where is the sceptical writer of two thousand years ago, or one thousand, or one hundred, or fifty—one is almost tempted

to come down like Abraham, to ten, and to ask, Where is one of them that our sceptical friends will stand by, as we stand by Moses and David, by Matthew and Paul? They are all out of date, and their works are to be found, if found at all, amidst the dusty, moth-eaten relics of the past, in the British Museum, or on the antiquary's book-shelf. But who will venture to predict the time when you will have to ransack the antiquary's library to find a copy of the writings of Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Hosea, Matthew, Paul, or John? These authors are all old, but they are always new. Old as they are, their words are as weighty, as powerful, as ever, and they are far more widely read to-day than at any previous time. In some old Bible of your grandfather, between the leaves which enclose some cherished passage that had often cheered the old man's heart, there is, perhaps, a little relic of the past—a rose leaf, a sprig of heliotrope, a forget-me-not. The colour is gone, the scent has evaporated, even the grace of form is crushed out of all recognition. You must touch it very tenderly, or it will crumble into dust, and

be all gone. It abides after a fashion, as human things abide; it does not live and abide as divine things live and abide. But the promise, over against which the little flower is lying, not only abides, but lives. It lives in ten thousand hearts as well as in yours, as rich in colour, as fresh in fragrance, as delightful to the soul as ever it was. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." The word of God is not like that of Demosthenes or of Cicero, whose speeches may still move to admiration but can no longer lead men on to action as in the days when they were fresh and strong. The word of God lives and breathes; lives with the life and breathes with the breath of the Spirit of the living God. This is the secret of its perennial freshness; this is the secret of its immortal youth: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." Of Homer, and Virgil, and Dante, and Milton; of Aristotle and Seneca, and Descartes and Bacon; of Demosthenes, and Cicero, and Burke—it may be said: "He being dead yet speaketh"; but of the Inspirer of the

Bible, and of Him alone, it can be said : "He, being alive, yet speaketh." The Spirit of God may use, often does use, other books ; but He identifies Himself with the Bible. He makes it vocal with His loving voice, and vital with His living power.

We find this power running through all the different forms of literature which have been employed. It is not equally distributed, but it so pervades the Bible as a whole that it is no exaggeration to say that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness : that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." There may be a question whether there is any of the excellence of this power in the Book of Esther, for example ; but that does not affect the general statement, it only suggests the reasonableness of the doubt which has all along been entertained as to the place of that book in the canon.

In view of this all-pervasiveness of the power, we can see how the whole of the Scriptures, and not only those parts where the Gospel is specially prominent, may be

truly inspired of God. We must not overpress the metaphor of the earthen vessels and the treasure therein contained, as indicating that we can separate the one from the other and show what parts of the Bible are earthen, and what pure treasure. We may illustrate the intermingling of the divine and the human in the Scriptures by the intermingling of flesh and spirit in the human body. This illustration is fully justified because, as we have seen in the introductory chapter, it is covered by the large sense of the word "inspiration": "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding." But who can tell the place of the spirit? It shines out in some places more than in others—most of all, no doubt, in the eyes. But are not the eyes flesh? It diminishes as we go down and out to the extremities, almost disappearing, as we may say, in hair and finger-nails, which are not even sensitive to the knife. But the life, in some mysterious manner, extends even there, for does not the power of growth prove its presence? So in Scripture there are parts where the power is at the minimum, and there are glowing centres where it is at the maximum; but just as there is life

power in every part of the body, so there is spirit power diffused throughout the Bible.

While the power may be said to be not only excellent, but even perfect when viewed in relation to the great object for which the revelation was given, there are other marvellous excellencies of the Scriptures which are quite incidental. So long as these are looked upon as merely incidental, they add in a delightful manner to the evidence of divine inspiration. Take, as an example of this, the utterances which trench on the domain of science. Make this a primary consideration, make it an essential that there should be in all such places an accurate anticipation of scientific discovery, make the whole credibility of the Bible turn on this complete correspondence, and you raise a host of difficulties which no ingenuity can completely remove, and men like Tyndall and Huxley are forced into scepticism. But bear in mind that the great object is to reveal God and make known His salvation, and that therefore we ought not to look for anticipations of scientific discovery; then, when we find how far above their contemporaries the inspired writers were, even in

this point of view ; when we find them using language which, though not anticipating modern discovery, is yet by its elevation of thought not unworthy of it, we see how the inspiration which runs specially along the line of the moral and spiritual has, at the same time, an enlarging and refining effect on the action of the mind in regard to subjects only incidentally touched. In all this there are new and striking tokens of divine inspiration. As illustration, let us glance at the epic of Creation in the beginning of the Bible. What a contrast to other cosmogonies ! Read it as an astronomical and geological treatise, and you have endless difficulties ; read it as a revelation of the one God in nature, and you have not only the perfect accomplishment of the main object, but you have incidentally a most marvellous correspondence with what science has revealed—a correspondence so marvellous that some distinguished astronomers and geologists have actually believed it to be a minutely accurate record. Make the demand that it must be a scientific revelation, and you put innumerable weapons into the hand of the enemy ; take it as it obviously is given, and you not only get rid of all the

difficulties, but you have such excellency—excellency above all that uninspired men have ever accomplished in the same direction—that one recognizes even here the manifest tokens of the divine inspiration.

To take another illustration of the same kind. We have no reason to believe that when the great Prophet of the Captivity looked up to the starry heavens, he was miraculously endowed with the knowledge of the Astronomer Royal of the twentieth century. We cannot suppose that on the basis of science miraculously made known to him in advance, he would have the same impression of the vastness of the universe and the minuteness of man as we have. How comes it, then, that when he has occasion to touch on the theme, he does it in a way that scarcely betrays the limitation of his knowledge, he does it in a way that would make it possible to read what he says about it at a meeting of the British Association, and no one would feel that it fell short of the requirements of the theme? Read Isaiah xl. from the twelfth verse to the end, and say if there is any utterance of modern times, I say not to excel it, but even to equal it. How did

this come to pass? Because he was inspired so as to see the great results of modern astronomy? Certainly not; but because he had a vision of God, and God is greater than all His worlds. It was the inspiration of the Almighty that so enlarged his mind that not only did he speak truly of God, but his language about the works of God was such that it has not staled in twenty-five centuries. What intelligent man can fail to see the excellency of the power even there?

Illustrations of this kind might be multiplied, bringing out other incidental excellencies: the wonderful literary charm of an idyll like *Ruth*, for example; the exquisite poetry of many of the *Psalms*; the eagle flights of a quondam fisherman like *John*; the elevation, not only of thought but even of language in a book like the *Apocalypse*, where the occasional badness of the Greek is surely sufficient evidence that there was no miraculous superseding of the author's limitations; and all would go to make it clear that while, on the supposition that the men were lifted miraculously out of their natural limitations, there are endless difficulties, it is only necessary to remember

that they were all "earthen vessels," in order not only to surmount all the difficulties, but to see in the unquestionable excellence of thought and style and even of language, new tokens of the inspiration of the Almighty.

CHAPTER XIII

The Place of Criticism

HAS criticism any place in dealing with the sacred Scriptures? And if so, what?

We must settle first what we mean by criticism. It is perhaps due to the depravity of human nature that the word almost invariably suggests fault-finding. When a book is handed over to a critic, must he find fault with it? The fault-finding function is needed, if there are serious faults to find. But what if the book be superlatively good? Then his function is to recognize and call attention to its excellencies. And if it be only fairly good, he will have both functions to discharge.

There are then two kinds of criticism, that of appreciation, and that of depreciation. In proportion as the work is good and the critic competent, will his criticism be appreciative.

And surely it would be a great mistake to refuse him the opportunity. If he has the power of discovering merits which are apt to be hid from the average reader, why should he not be allowed to point these out?

This is clearly the Apostle Paul's idea, as shown in the striking passage 1 Corinthians ii. 11-15, where he calls for this critical appreciation. He expects and wishes the criticism to be thorough and searching. The word he uses is *ἀνακρίνω*, which is just our word "criticize," with a strengthening prefix specially calling for earnest, careful scrutiny. Only he insists that the critic must be competent. As the things he is dealing with are spiritual things, he must have the spiritual faculty: "The natural man," he says, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But (and here is the critic's Magna Charta) he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (vers. 14, 15). That is liberty, is it not? Why is the Apostle not afraid to give the critic so loose a rein? Because the man who is truly spiritual is sure to

appreciate, not depreciate, the things of God.

So far, the question seems exceedingly simple. But a complication comes in, so far as the Scriptures are concerned, when we remember that there are two elements to be considered: the revelation which is of God, and the record of it which is through the agency of man, used by God, indeed, in His adorable providence, but not so as to obliterate the human personality. This view of the subject is put strikingly before us by the same Apostle in the passage we have used in another connection, "We have this treasure ("the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" referred to in the preceding verse) in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." There are two things therefore to be considered: first the treasure of divine revelation, and next the earthen vessels which contain it. Let us examine what is the place, and what ought to be the attitude of criticism in the one case and in the other.

(1) In regard to the divine revelation, there surely can be no place for the fault-finding critic. Shall any one find fault with "the

light of the knowledge of the glory of God" ? Nor can there be any place for the superior critic. Some might be disposed to think the Apostle wrong in giving criticism, even the most appreciative criticism, any place here. Is it not presumption to express any opinion, however laudatory ? It would certainly be, if it were done with a sense of superiority. Here, again, it is apt to be assumed that a critic is necessarily a superior person—another token of the depravity of human nature, for surely it is not a fair assumption. Shakespeare has had many critics. Do they all assume superiority ? Does any one of them, worth listening to, assume superiority ? And if the ordinary critic of Shakespeare naturally takes a place far beneath the works he is appreciating, how much more shall we expect that he whose duty it is to call attention to the things of God will not only not assume superiority—surely an unthinkable audacity !—but will bow low in adoration at His feet.

When we consider this, we shall see how completely out of court are a whole class of self-styled critics. They take up the sacred Scriptures, and subject them to a scrutiny which may be careful enough, but which

deliberately sets aside things of God as an impossibility. They start with the dogma of the denial of the supernatural. What possible chance is there of appreciation there? The things of God are necessarily "foolishness" to such people, neither can they know them; because the things of God are spiritually discerned, and they are at the opposite pole.

Such persons are absolutely incompetent critics, no matter how learned and even wise they may be in the things of the world. This seems self-evident, but it is far too little realized in Bible criticism. There are many who seem to think that if a man is a great linguist, an accomplished historian, and an acute literary critic, he is just the man to deal thoroughly and satisfactorily with divine revelation; and yet he may be absolutely incompetent. This is what the Apostle so strongly urges in his letter to the Corinthians. Corinth was not far from Athens geographically, and it was not very far behind it in culture. There were many competent critics there of the literary, the historical, the linguistic, and the artistic. And these faculties all had their value in literature, in history, in language, in art;

but the possession of any or all of these did not constitute a man a qualified critic of divine revelation.

Can any one really dispute the justice of the Apostle's position? Who would think of submitting a scheme of colour to the most learned and accomplished man in all the world, if he were blind? Who would submit a Sonata of Beethoven to a deaf man, or even to the greatest scholar in the land, if he had no ear for music? The fatal objection in every such case would be that he was destitute of the only faculty to which the final appeal can rightly be made.

Suppose the passage we are reading to be the healing of the paralytic, and that we have come to the place where Jesus, answering His critics, says, "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house." We see the light in Jesus' face, recognize the grandeur of His mission, and the appropriateness alike of the deed of mercy and the word of grace. It is the opening of heaven and the pouring of light on earth's darkness. Our hearts are full of thanksgiving and praise. But here are

two men approaching from opposite directions. One of them says, "Suppose I could change the pen with which I write this into a pen-wiper, I should not thus make what I write any the truer or more convincing." The other makes a similar remark about a centaur trotting down Regent Street. Surely these men must have been very vulgar people! No; on the contrary, one is an apostle of sweetness and light, and the other is a master of scientific exposition; the name of the one being Matthew Arnold, and of the other Thomas H. Huxley. But are such men as these at all capable of judging our Lord's deeds of mercy? On the other hand, to the humblest man, who has had the experience of sins forgiven and of grace to walk in the paths of righteousness after powers atrophied by neglect or palsied by sin, the deed of Christ is no breach of nature's laws, rather a healing of some old breach, the most natural thing in all the world to be done by the Saviour of the world, the great Healer, "der Heiland," as the Germans beautifully call Him. "In Thy light shall we see light"; in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (and salvation is His glory) we see wondrous light in the

story on the printed page. Think of the imbecility, to say nothing of the unspirituality, of putting the change of a pen into a pen-wiper, or the trotting of a centaur down Regent Street, in the same category as that great and blessed revelation of the fulfilment of man's greatest need!

Let it be set down then as absolutely necessary to competence for the position of Bible critic, that a man have the spiritual faculty, that he not only does not deny God, but that he has an eye to see the light of His glory, an ear attuned to hear His voice, his whole nature open to welcome His Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, such a man is competent to recognize the things of God even though he be destitute of all other capabilities. He would be better with them, no doubt, but he can do without them. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things." He cannot help it, in fact. All spiritual men not only may but must use the critical faculty if they are to make anything of their Bibles. The devout reader of Holy Scripture is using the critical faculty continually. Even those who hold, or think they hold (for it is only theory with them), that every sentence in

all the Bible is equally inspired of God, never have the courage of their opinions right through. They open their Bible about the middle, and find this strong and very definite declaration: "A man hath no pre-eminence over a beast" (Ecclesiastes iii. 19). They turn to a more familiar place and read: "Fear not; ye are of more value than many sparrows." Are they troubled? Not at all. How do they settle it? By the exercise of higher criticism. It is not lower criticism. It has not to do with the lexicon or the grammar. They are not equipped for that. But they have the higher critical faculty, and they use it without hesitation. There is not a word in either Ecclesiastes or Luke to indicate that in the one case they are not to believe all they read, and in the other they are. There is no preface in either case to indicate that the literary form of the one book is quite different from that of the other. And probably our simple Bible reader could not tell why it is he treats the two passages in the same Bible so very differently. He is probably not consciously exercising the faculty of higher criticism, but he is most certainly doing it, however unconsciously. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things."

How is it that the Bible of the simplest saints will be well worn and thumbed, perhaps actually torn, at the Psalms and in Gospels, and the page quite clean in Leviticus and in Esther? It is because they are higher critics. And their criticism is perfectly just. They might not acknowledge in words that there are degrees of inspiration in the Bible; but the markings in their Bibles make it perfectly plain that in effect they do. It is quite possible, indeed, for one who has nothing of the critical faculty to read over the whole Bible mechanically, a chapter a day perhaps, and get as much good out of the toughest morsels as out of the sweetest, that is, probably, no good at all. Such an one can dispense altogether with criticism of all kinds; but if he is to make real use of his Bible, if he is to discern the things of God which are there, he must read it in the light of such critical faculty as he has. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things."

"Yet he himself is judged of no man." A whole university of learned professors giving their verdict on matters linguistic, historical, literary, philosophical, metaphysical, might rule out the supernatural. It would not affect him in the least. He has an ear to

hear what the Spirit saith. He hears the music of the spheres. "The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians know." Or, to put it in apostolic phrase: "He has an unction from the Holy One, and knows."

(2) But is not the treasure in earthen vessels? And is there not room here for a different kind of criticism? And may not the qualities which were inadequate for appreciating the things of God be sufficient for dealing with the earthen vessels?

There is some truth in this way of putting it. The revelation of God comes to us in the ordinary vehicles of speech and story, poetry and prose, biography, history, and literature generally. In order, therefore, to deal with this side of the things of God, it is necessary that there should be a critical apparatus; hence scholarship of all kinds,—linguistic, historical, literary,—is useful, and for thorough work needful. We have seen that the man who is spiritual is in the main thing independent of all these: he can find the things of God, however little he knows of these other things; and he can hold to the things of God, however much learned critics in the lower sphere may say against them.

But if he is a wise and humble man, he will keep to his own sphere. He will not feel called upon stoutly to deny what some grammarian has to say about grammar, or some linguist about language, or some literary man about style, or some historic critic about particular events. If what is said on these things trouble him at all, it will be enough for him to think : " Whether these things be so or not, I know not ; one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." The revelation of God lies clear before him, for he has the spiritual eye ; the divine voice is distinctly heard, for he has the spiritual ear ; the treasure in the vessel is grandly appreciated, for he has the spiritual mind ; but he is not the man to settle dogmatically difficult questions which belong to another sphere, such as the nature and degrees of inspiration. The fact of inspiration he sees and knows ; he cannot help seeing it, for the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is shining in his heart ; but the nature and degree of it he is not capable of discussing. Such a difficult (though comparatively unimportant question) requires other faculties than his.

Still, on the other hand, it is important to remember that while scholarship is necessary

in order to competence for dealing with the earthen-vessel side of things, even here the spiritual mind is indispensable for complete competence. We do not say that the work of unspiritual men is never of any use. It may be, especially in the way of gathering materials; but for any thorough dealing even with the human side of revelation, it is quite necessary that there should be the spiritual faculty.

The reason of this lies in the fact that the divine and human in revelation are not practically separable. Here is where the Apostle's admirable illustration falls short of the whole truth, as all illustrations must. If we could hand over the treasure to the spiritual man, and the earthen vessel to the intellectual and scholarly man, and let each deal with his own and leave the other untouched, it might work. But you cannot do this. The inspiration of the Scriptures is like the inspiration of the man. It is all through. God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. The in-breathed life is all through the body—in greater degree in some parts, in lesser degree in others—but it pervades the whole, so that you cannot take a man, and hand the spiritual

part of him apart from the material, to one investigator, and the bodily part of him without the spirit to another. Hence it comes that even in the investigation of the body the spirit must not be left out of view, just as in the study of the spirit in any thorough way the body also must be taken into account. Let it be understood then that while the divine and the human in the Scriptures are separable in thought, they are not so in fact. Therefore it is impossible to judge rightly even of the earthen vessel if we have no appreciation of the treasure which is in it.

This will appear still more clearly if we remember that we cannot appreciate the earthen vessel apart from its relation to the treasure. Here is where many excellent Christians make a great mistake. They start with the idea that God cannot use anything earthen at all, unless He miraculously takes away its earthenness, and makes it pure heavenly. And whenever the process of searching discloses the earthenness of any of the vessels, they think all is lost. Or if they do not go this length, they think it is a depreciation of the Bible to point it out. Anything earthen in the Bible! Perish

the thought! But if they look at the matter with the Apostle's eye, they will see that the criticism which discloses the earthen vessel is really appreciation, not of the vessel but of Him who can use it, earthen as it is and must be, for conveying His heavenly treasure. Clearly that is the way the Apostle views it: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Even in this case, therefore, mere fault-finding and error-picking is quite incompetent criticism. Fault-finding is the easiest thing in the world. Any dullard can excel in it. But appreciation, specially spiritual appreciation, and most of all, perhaps, the appreciation of the divine in the human, requires the spiritual faculty. A man who can only chip away at the earthen vessel and has no eye for the treasure in it, is quite useless. The spiritual man can judge the spiritual side of things even if he have no faculty for scrutinizing the earthen vessel; but the unspiritual man cannot even appraise the earthen vessel, for it can be rightly appraised only in relation to that which it contains and conveys. A man might judge a picture even if he could not see its frame;

but how can any man judge the frame of the picture if he cannot see the picture? For it is not only that spiritual things are foolishness to him, but even the natural things are often foolish to him if he cannot see the spiritual shining in them and through them.

Take a very homely example. Suppose a being scientifically and philosophically gifted in the highest degree, but completely ignorant of love, as much a stranger to it as many a man is to God, setting himself to study the actions of a mother fondling her infant, with a view to a thorough interpretation of them all. He follows all the motions, describes the curves, counts the number of the kisses (all the time wondering what they can possibly mean), listens to the varied sounds, registers and tabulates them all, makes the most careful and critical examination of every phenomenon — and then gives out as his sage verdict, "The woman is a fool." For are not all these things foolishness to him? But if now there could come suddenly into his soul a great influx of love, the love which fills the heart of the father of the child as he watches the same process, would they be foolishness any longer? You cannot

understand even the outward and fleshly if you have no idea of the inward and spiritual.

With the love of God in the heart, a man will see it all. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God will shine in the face of Jesus Christ, and rays of divine light and love will flash out from every page of the sacred Scriptures.

CHAPTER XIV

The Gains from Reverent Criticism

ARE we to have no chapter on the losses ? Certainly not. There are no losses from reverent criticism. We admit that if irreverent criticism is allowed to hold the field, nothing but loss will be the result. If those to whom the word of revelation is "spirit and life" leave the searching of the Scriptures to those destitute of the spiritual faculty, the result will be disastrous. It will be like a report of human life reached through the anatomy of the dead body. The criticism of depreciation must be met by the criticism of appreciation ; and when Christian people put the most appreciative critics in the same class with the most destructive, and condemn them all alike, they certainly do their best to play into the hands of the foes of inspiration.

We admit that there are results of

investigation which look like loss. If a man starts with a rigid theory of his own as the foundation of his faith, it is no wonder that he is appalled when his theory is set aside. It seems a terrible loss. But what if he get a far better foundation in its place? Will not the disturbance be a blessing in disguise? Among the great and precious promises of the word of God is this: "God hath promised to shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Hebrews xii. 26), and the reason why this is a promise and not a threat is given thus: "That those things which cannot be shaken may remain." That great promise God has often fulfilled, and He has been fulfilling it in our times. Therefore, whatever apparent losses are the result of spiritual and spirit-guided criticism will be found to be really gains. Whatever does not stand in times like these is better gone.

We have no word of scorn or even of disparagement for the temple of faith as it stood in the days of our fathers and grandfathers. Its foundation was in the holy mountains, and its main structure was of the order of "gold, silver, and precious stones," which remain and ever shall abide. There

was indeed, as alas ! there always is in all that is "of this building," some "wood and hay and stubble" ; but with all that was imperfect in it, it was a sanctuary of noble souls, the anthems sung in it did not roll to wintry skies, and the worshippers and workers who were trained in it did great things for the kingdom of God, and have made us heirs of institutions and enterprises on which God has poured blessings so abundant that now the whole round world is open to the glad tidings of His Gospel. The fires which have been taking away the wood and hay and stubble may have seemed at times to threaten the structure itself, but God is mindful of His own, He can make, and has made, the wrath of the destroyer to praise Him, and restrained the remainder thereof. And now that the destroyer has done his worst, now that shakable things have been shaken, the work of reconstruction is going on apace, and we have good reason to believe that the temple of faith in the twentieth century will be nobler and grander than ever, will have in it a still richer and fuller anthem of praise, will be the nursing mother of equally devoted sons and daughters, who will accomplish even more

for the in-bringing of the kingdom of God than did the great souls who lived the life and did the work of the century that is gone.

Let us, then, address ourselves hopefully to the subject now before us: The gains from reverent criticism. We shall mention only some of the most outstanding.

I. An Unassailable Foundation.

It is very difficult for those believers in verbal inspiration, whose faith is, as a matter of fact, firmly founded on the Rock Christ, and who therefore can say with the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed," to realize how very weak is the theory of Scripture on which they have erroneously supposed their faith to rest. Here is a line of thought which has been only too familiar in the past: Why do you believe in Christ? Because I read about Him in the Bible.—Why do you believe the Bible? Because it is an inspired book.—What is an inspired book? A book which is all the same as if it had been written by the finger of God, so that every line and word of it must be taken as if it came straight out of heaven. Now, these people's faith may be of the strongest and noblest

quality. It may be as genuine faith in Christ as that of the very best of those who hold the other views. The mistake is in the underpinning of it. They rest Christ on the Bible ; and so far there is no practical harm done, for the Bible, treated fairly, is quite strong enough to bear the weight ; but then they rest the Bible on a theory of inspiration which will not bear any weight. It would not bear the weight of a single believer, as is often found to be tragically true. Here is a man who has been brought up in the strictest sect, with the most definite views of the mechanical theory of inspiration, and who, on the basis of it, has attended Church, and taught in the Sunday School for many years ; but not having the root of the matter in him, that is, not having a personal acquaintance with Christ, when he is suddenly confronted with an array of Bible difficulties, he sees that the theory of inspiration which he has been taught cannot stand the test of criticism, and having always regarded this theory as the foundation of everything, thinks that when it gives way he must give up everything. So he gives up the Bible because it is not what he thought it to be, and then, having given up

the Bible, he concludes, as a matter of course, that he must give up Christ, and becomes a theist, or an atheist, or an agnostic.

It may seem to many good people of very little consequence whether a man says he believes in Christ because He is in the Bible, or believes in the Bible because Christ is in it; but there is all the difference in the world between the stability of the one position and of the other. Christ, as set before us not only in the Gospel pages, and in the testimony of His witnesses throughout the Scriptures, but in His personal presence here and now, is a fact which can as little be set aside by those who have eyes to see as can the sun in the heavens. The theory of verbal inspiration makes no such appeal. You cannot say that a man is spiritually blind who has difficulty as to the high praiseworthiness of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. He may be wrong, of course; but you cannot say that he is not of the truth if he hesitate as to whether that is of the truth. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is not in the face of Jael, as it is in the face of Jesus Christ. I do not say there is absolutely none of it in her face, but it does not shine out there so as to condemn a

man to be of a reprobate mind who does not discern it.

One of the most illuminating and convincing books of our time is Carnegie Simpson's "Fact of Christ." Every link in that masterly argument is entirely independent of any theory of inspiration, or even of the fact of inspiration. It would stand good if we knew nothing whatever about the origin or composition of any of the books of the Bible. It simply takes them as we find them, just as we might pick up a collection of Greek literature and read it in an appreciative spirit. It is a fine example of the spirit of the appreciative critic, with the result that to those in sympathy with whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, the fact of Christ stands out as the crowning fact of all human history. Clearly this is a position which is unaffected by any number of Bible difficulties. These may affect the view we take of certain questions more or less remotely connected with the central truth, but none of them, nor all of them together can alter the great luminous fact of CHRIST, which shines in the Bible as the sun shines in the heavens. This is the

only unassailable foundation. It is so according to the word of Christ Himself, as when He said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life"; it is so according to the apostolic testimony: "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"; and again: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house"—a passage, by the way, which shows how completely St. Peter understood our Saviour when He said: "Upon this rock I will build My Church." And this is the position taken practically by all good Christians, both collectively and individually, for the great congregation sings—

"The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord";

and the individual believer exults—

"On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the mischief which has been done, and is now done, by making the shifting sand of human theory the foundation on which the Christian

faith is built. All the most popular anti-Christian literature of the present day assumes that Christianity stands or falls with what is supposed to be the orthodox theory of inspiration. Take the works of Samuel Laing, for example, which are circulated by tens of thousands, and which, being written by a business man of considerable culture, fair acquaintance with science, and a real appreciation of poetry and art, appeals not only to the proverbial man on the street, but to the intelligence of fairly educated men. There is often a sweet reasonableness in his way of putting things, which captivates the reader, and inclines him to accept his suggestions. But it will be found that not a line of his writings is valid against the fact of Christ, and its vast moment. Here, for example, is his method of attack: "What is the meaning of inspiration? It means that a certain book was not written, as all other books in the world have been written, by writers who were fallible, and whose statements and opinions, however admirable in the main and made in perfect good faith, inevitably reflected the views of the age in which they lived, and contained matters subsequent ages found to be obsolete or

erroneous, but that this particular book was miraculously dictated by an infallible God, and, therefore, absolutely and for all time true. But, as a chain cannot be stronger than its weakest link, if any one of these statements were proved not to be true, the theory of inspiration failed." This is conclusive against the theory, but how does it affect the fact of Christ? Is the sun less a sun since the sun-spots were discovered? They probably do not help its shining. Do they hinder it? Much?

There lies before me, as I write, a list of twenty-six cheap reprints issued by the Rationalist Press Association. Of these the majority are what may be called scientific treatises, such as Huxley's lectures and addresses, and Darwin's "Origin of Species," not one of which is antagonistic to the modern view of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures; and all the rest, with the possible exception of Renan's and Clodd's books on the Life of Jesus, are equally harmless to those who have any faculty of spiritual appreciation. The sale of these books, we are told, has already reached close on a million. Think what havoc is thus made on the faith which rests all on the theory of verbal

inspiration, whereas to those who remember the distinction between the earthen vessels and the treasure contained in them, there is scarcely one of them that would not make our position clearer and more unassailable than ever, on the principle set forth in Chapter XII. There are, no doubt, those now, as always, who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; but there are multitudes of good, earnest souls who do love the light, but have been forced into unbelief by the cruel demand that they must accept every word of the Bible as coming direct from God, or reject the whole. They are too conscientious to say they can accept every word; so the only alternative left to them is to be done with it altogether.

A theory of inspiration is perhaps the very poorest foundation which has ever been imagined for Christian faith. It may come in very well in the superstructure. After we have accepted Christ, we may learn from Him what to think of the inspiration of the Scriptures. That is what we have been trying to do throughout this little volume. And though a tortoise, or even an elephant, is a poor foundation for the earth to stand on, we may find that even the tortoise will

stand as securely as any other creature on the earth—always provided it can stand on its own feet. In any case, we may rest assured that if a man truly believes in Christ, he will not fail to rise to a worthy faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures.

II. A Great Cloud of Witnesses.

So far in this chapter we have been dealing with what is called internal evidence—the appeal of Christ and His word to the soul. This is the only sure foundation for a stable faith. It is time now to look at the external evidence, which may appeal even to those in whom the spiritual faculty is not yet awakened. As we have already seen (Chapter VIII.), mere external evidence cannot of itself produce faith, but may arrest attention so as to lead men to lift up their souls to God, and give heed to His message of salvation. We may, in this connection, recall again that saying of our Lord: “Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works’ sake.” The first of the two appeals is to those who have the spiritual faculty in full exercise, the second is to those in whom it is deficient.

The great bulk of the external evidence is in the library of books which have been bound up together under the general title of "the Bible." Now, there is in these books a marvellous unity which justifies their being bound up in this way; and in fact this unity is one of the notable marks of divine inspiration. But it is a very great mistake in dealing with the external evidence, to treat the Bible as if it were only one book, every part standing or falling with every other part; for thus not only is the weakening of one part the weakening of all, but the witness of all is reduced to the witness of one.

This has been set forth by the author in a previous volume, entitled "*Rock versus Sand*," three paragraphs of which he takes the liberty of reproducing in substance.

We have to deal here with the extraordinary perversity and unfairness, so common in our day, of treating the Scriptures as if the whole collection were only one book. Of all the unfair devices for weakening the evidences of Christianity this is perhaps the very worst. And it is surprising that so many good Christians

allow it and even encourage it—sometimes demand it. So great is the mischief arising from this, that it would almost seem a pity that, even for convenience, the sixty-six or more books which form our Bible are so constantly bound together in one volume. For not only is there the unhappy result of reducing the many witnesses to one, in the minds of unthinking people, but also of silencing and putting out of court that one. For such unreasoning suspicion is abroad about the Bible, that there are multitudes of people who would attach a great deal more importance to the testimony of almost any writing outside the Bible, than of any number of writings within it. Show them a fact attested by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Paul and Peter, and they will say: "All that is in the Bible; give us something outside of the Bible and we will believe it." The Bible, in the first place, is regarded by them as the work of a single author; and in the second, as that of a prejudiced author—one who has his own cause to bolster up; and accordingly a hundred confirmations within its covers are not so good as one from the outside would be.

Is this not unreasonable in the extreme?

Let me suppose a case, in order to put the monstrous injustice in a clear light. Suppose that, very soon after the invention of printing, some enterprising editor had collected all the original materials of any value in regard to the history of the Roman Republic into one volume, which he issued to the world under the title of "The History of the Roman Republic"; and suppose further that it became so popular that it was circulated first by hundreds, then by thousands, then by hundreds of thousands, and finally by the million, so that it came into almost everybody's hands. But in course of time, after all the world had become accustomed to it in its form of a single volume, there sprang up a fashion of scepticism on the whole subject, and everything in the volume was regarded with suspicion; and accordingly the whole history of the Roman Republic was called in question. Those who believed it called attention to the many different authorities who corroborated each other. "Here is Livy, who writes about it in Latin. Here is Dion Cassius, who writes about the same thing in Greek. Here are speeches of Cicero that relate to the same events. And

here are poems of Horace that could not have been written unless these facts were so." But the opposite party immediately silenced them by triumphantly pointing out that all these different authorities were no authorities at all. Why not? Because "it is only one book after all." That, of course, settled the question. In the first place it disposed of all the separate witnesses, of Livy, and Dion, and Cicero, and all the rest; for were they not all one? And in the second place it disposed even of the single witness of the collective book, because it was the credibility of the book itself which was in question, and therefore, all that was in the book must be ruled out as the testimony of an interested party. And so it came to pass that, from the single unfortunate circumstance of the scattered materials having been gathered together as bearing on the one great subject, the evidence for the history of the Roman Republic was utterly destroyed!

Let us then by all means remember, when we are dealing with the subject of the Scriptures, that we are dealing not with one book, but with at least sixty-six; not with a single volume, but with a library.

Remember, further, that these sixty-six books are not links, but strands of evidence. There is, indeed, a golden chain of sacred history from Genesis to Revelation, so that, in a historical point of view, many of the books of the Bible are links. But, so far as the evidences of Christianity are concerned, they are not links, but strands. This can be very easily shown. The strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link; and if a single link gives way, the whole is useless. Now, will any one pretend to say that, if it were proved that the Book of Esther had no divine authority, we should have to give up the Gospel of Matthew? Would there be no evidence for the divine authority of Christ if the Lamentations of Jeremiah had happened to have been lost? Why, there would be enough to establish the divine authority of Christ, if we had nothing more than the four evangelists; and whatever of confirmation or elucidation comes from the many other books, is just so much in addition. The Bible is not a chain of sixty-six links, it is a cable of sixty-six strands.

This is such an important matter that it may be well to put it in another way. So

long as the inspiration of the Bible is treated as the foundation of faith, the Bible occupies the position of a book whose claims are to be tried in the court of reason. On this account it is not allowed to speak for itself. It occupies the position of the panel at the bar. Where, then, are the witnesses ?

One is reminded here of the course of procedure at a Presbyterian synod. If a complaint is made against a presbytery on which the synod must adjudicate, the presbytery is for the time disfranchised ; not one member of it, however much he knows about the case, is allowed to vote, because he is an interested party. In the same way, Moses and Samuel and David and Isaiah, and Matthew and John and Paul are all put out of court ; for is it not the claims of the Bible that are being tried, and why should any of these people who belong to the Bible have any voice in it ?

That is the position into which those put the Bible who make its inspiration the fundamental question. But now, make the fundamental question, What think ye of Christ ? What divine Face looks out of the canvas of the book and fascinates you ? Immediately there spring up a whole array

of witnesses, the very best, the most competent, the very witnesses who can decide the case.

But there is a still greater weakness in the position taken by the advocates of what is called "Scripture infallibility." Not only do they allow the best witnesses to be discredited in advance by belonging to the party which is on trial, but they accept the burden of proving them to be not only honest and capable, which is right enough, but infallible, which is outrageous injustice. Did ever any one hear of such a demand in any court of justice in all the world? and was ever a defendant so weak as to yield to it? to say nothing of being so foolish as to insist on it. Here is a man who has his witness to bear in a case with which he has the best opportunity of being acquainted. He is of good character, of sound judgment, and has no motive for bearing false witness. But he is not acquainted with geology; he has actually made a mistake in history. "Put him down. You must get somebody who never made a mistake, otherwise we cannot believe a word." It does seem as if our Lord Christ had as little justice with His accusers now as He had before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate.

Only lay aside this most unreasonable demand of infallibility on the part of witnesses, and we are in a position to see that the testimony to Christ as the Saviour of mankind is simply overwhelming. There has been nothing like it in the whole history of the world. We all believe in what we read of Alexander the Great and Julius Cæsar, of Socrates and Seneca, and of many other less noteworthy personages in ancient history. How many witnesses do we require? In many cases a single trustworthy witness is all that is demanded. Think how much we depend on the solitary testimony of Plutarch; yet no one thinks it necessary to prove that Plutarch was infallible. We think ourselves happy when we have a twofold witness, as in the case of the life and teaching of Socrates. Is there a single person in all ancient history of whom we have four biographies by men of the character and trustworthiness of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Even if that were all, it would be incomparable; but think of the number of letters devoted to setting the same august personage before the eyes of men. And such biographies! And such letters! It is only familiarity with them that makes it

possible for any intelligent person to miss the wonder and the glory of it.

And there are not only the contemporaries of Christ, but the marvellous array of witnesses long in advance, whose testimony is enshrined in the Old Testament Scriptures. It would greatly help to keep us in the right track in this matter if we would remember the reason our Saviour gives for searching these Scriptures, namely, "They are they that testify of Me." Consider how independent this makes us of the innumerable difficulties which have been raised by criticism in regard to the Old Testament. "They are they that testify of Me," says Christ. Cannot Moses testify of Christ without being as learned in the learning of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" as he was in that of the Egyptians? Cannot David testify of Christ, though, instead of doing it alone in the Book of Psalms, as he was once supposed to do, he be surrounded with a whole company of witnesses to share with him the honour, and change the solo into the grandest chorus the world has ever heard? Cannot Isaiah testify of Christ, though the same man may not have written the whole book which now

bears his name? If his witness is not single and solitary, as we used to think, but the witness of two, both of them men marvellously gifted, and bearing their testimony with such wonderful harmony that people generally believed, till lately, it was the voice of one; if the solo be changed into a duet, or even into a quartette, what are we the worse?

Furthermore, there is this extraordinary phenomenon, that not only are there witnesses contemporary, and witnesses in advance, but a great cloud of witnesses ever since. This is such an extraordinary corroboration and withal made so commonplace by familiarity, that it may be well to make a fresh statement of it.

It will make the point clearer if I recall a question put to me by an anxious inquirer who spoke of Christianity—"Christianity," observe, that is the way so many think of our faith, as belief in something ending in *ity* or *ism*, some system of doctrines completed long ago and handed down the ages. Well, this young friend, speaking of Christianity, said, "It seems so long ago, how can I know that it has any more truth in it than other religions?"

One sees the force of the question, and can sympathize with the difficulty. If it were a question of the rivalry of so many religions—systems of thought which have been elaborated at different periods—then the longer the time since the religion was promulgated the greater the difficulty in accepting it as the only true one; for is not the world always learning, and why not on this subject as well as every other; and if the people of that early time were wrong as they certainly were on so many other subjects, why should they happen to be right in this? We can sympathize with the difficulty thoroughly, so long as it is a mere question of a religion or a system of doctrine on the most difficult of all subjects. But that is not the point at all. It is not a question of a religion, it is the presence with us of a heavenly Friend, who lived a long time ago, it is true, but who claimed that He would be with us to the end of the ages, and as to whose real presence appeal can be made to multitudes in all generations since for the verification of His claim.

Think what this cloud of witnesses means, and how the evidence instead of weakening as the centuries pass, keeps growing

continually. To realize this, let us go back for a moment to the time when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. It was the first of the ages of the Christian era, and the number who had believed in Christ was very small indeed. The writer could appeal to some who finished their course: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." But when he wanted a "cloud of witnesses," he had to go to the men of faith under the Old Covenant, none of whom, from the nature of the case, could be witnesses to the living Christ. For that he could appeal to yesterday, and assure them it was the same to-day; but as for the ages to come—they lay before him and it was easy enough (the doubter might suggest) for him to assume that it would be the same throughout these ages; but how does he know? It is quite safe to prophesy a thousand years in advance. Nobody can prove you wrong.

But now many of these ages which were to come lie behind us, and there is not one of them that does not bear its testimony

to the living and reigning and saving Christ. The history of the Church has been a very chequered one, but there is no time in all its past when there have not been new witnesses. Think again how poor the early Church was in this respect, right on to the end of the apostolic period. Think of John there in lonely Patmos, the cruel Domitian on the world's throne, the Church of Christ everywhere scattered and peeled,—for aught that appeared, ended,—and he, the last of the Twelve, banished to a lonely rock in the sea to die; if there ever was an excuse for abandoning all hope it was then; yet see with what magnificent faith he looks forward to the future, and speaks of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing."

But what the lone seer descried in the dim future, we can all see plainly in the historic past; only for thousands and ten thousands we can put millions now, millions of witnesses to the living Christ, who have testified through life and in death that Christ Jesus the Saviour of the world was with

them, faithful and true, loving and tender, an "ever present help in time of trouble"; the same yesterday and to-day, and age after age continually.

It may be here objected that we have taken no notice of what to many is the chief difficulty, namely, that, while witnesses such as Plutarch and Livy are readily accepted when they testify to ordinary facts, we at once question them when they relate prodigies; whereas the witnesses we cite are not testifying to an ordinary man doing ordinary things, but to a very extraordinary man doing most extraordinary things.

To deal with this fully would require a separate treatise; but it may be pointed out that the modern view of the "miracles" which has come in with the advance of criticism puts us in a very strong position here also. So long as the miracles were supposed to be something appended to the revelation to certify its truth, their position was precarious; but when we realize that they are not so much evidences, as parts, of the revelation, that they are signs of the kingdom of heaven, that they are not portents or prodigies, but bound up naturally

and not incongruously with the character of Christ, who accepted a reputation for them; when we realize that they are not separable excrescences as they are in the pages of uncritical historians and biographers, but are of the very substance of the testimony of all the witnesses; when we think that these testimonies to a mighty Saviour, originating in the dimness of remote antiquity, grew clearer and clearer as the centuries advanced till the full light blazed out in the acclaim of those who saw His glory; and when we think that the nature of the witness of the innumerable multitude since is such as to confirm, not the ordinary facts of the life on earth, but the divine power of the ever-living Saviour—when we think of all this, we see that not only the amount, but the quality of the testimony, points unequivocally to One who is not a transitory mortal, but still lives and reigns and saves.

It is easy, of course, for a wholly unspiritual mind to set all this aside at the dictation of a preconceived theory which rules out the supernatural; but wherever the spiritual faculty is not starved out by disuse or perverted by sin, the accumulated evidence is, as we have said, simply overwhelming. Line

up the procession once more, and say if there ever has been anything approaching it in the wide world. See there, first, the long line of prophets, every one of them with a light in his eye and a fire in his soul, as, with a forward pointing finger, he says, "The Christ is coming, the Christ of God is coming;" see next the glorious company of the apostles and early Christians, every one of them with still more abundant tokens of heavenly inspiration, all uniting in the witness: "The Christ is come, the Christ of God is come;" and, following them, an innumerable multitude swelling on and on, till it embraces every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and with one accord they all say, "The Christ of God is come, He is with us, a living Saviour, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

How completely out of court now is the old question whether the Bible rests on the Church or the Church on the Bible. What is the Bible but ancient Church history up to the fulness of the times when the revelation was completed in Christ? And what is the Church but the continued succession of witnesses to the once crucified and now exalted Redeemer of mankind? Neither Church

nor Bible is the foundation. It is not Holy Scripture which is the impregnable rock. It is Christ Himself. Other foundation can no man lay.

“The Church’s *one* foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord.”

III. A Fresh Human Interest.

“The Bible is a new book to me now.” How often have we heard this testimony in the last quarter of a century! We have always been familiar with it on the part of those who have passed from darkness into light, who have learned for the first time that it was in very deed the word of God, with messages of forgiveness and eternal life. But the testimony we refer to is not from newly converted people, but from those whose eyes have been opened to the human interest in the Bible; not from those who for the first time discover that it is the voice of God, but from those who, long accustomed to that mighty fact, have just learned that it is also the word of man, God’s message reaching us through the thoughts and emotions of men of like passions with ourselves.

The old painters depicted the saints of the Bible with golden aureoles round their

heads. These aureoles have stayed on till quite lately, and have not helped us into mutual acquaintance. How should we like a man so decorated to be a guest in our home? How uncomfortable for us, how unhappy for him! There is, we are glad to admit, that in many a face which fairly answers to the golden aureole of the painters; there is such a thing as the shining of a human countenance with a heavenly light. But though heavenly, it is not unearthly—that is the point. Heaven and earth are not contrasts, were never intended to be. An aureole must not be an appendage to a man: if it be something wrought into his genuine humanity, it is quite another thing. So with the inspiration of the apostles and prophets. They are Spirit-guided, but they are none the less men; and all they write is of human as well as divine interest.

But is not the humanity of the Bible so obvious that it needs no stating or emphasizing? Not so. This might be inferred, indeed, from the very tone in which it has been the almost universal habit to read the Scriptures, so unnatural, so sepulchral sometimes. And apart from this, it is only too evident from the attitude many short-sighted

Christians take as to those investigations which tend to put us in touch with the life and times of these holy men of old. They think the time would be much better employed in devout meditation on the text of Scripture, catching the divine meaning where it is obvious, and spiritualizing where it is not. But in this way the human interest is obscured or lost. It is, perhaps, not too much to say that to very many good Christian people in the last generation, the personality of the prophets of the Old Testament, and even of the apostles of the New, was as completely lost as was the humanity of Jesus to the poet Dante, who took all his illustrations of the virtues and graces from the very scanty materials of the life of the Virgin Mary, and not one from the life of our Lord. A "text" from one book was exactly the same as a "text" from another. It could be cut out from its context, and set alongside of a number of others cut out in the same way, to be used as "proofs" of some controverted doctrine. For all the use the men's names were, they might have been blotted out and the word "God" put in instead. There were those even (are there not some survivors yet?) who thought it a

merit to ignore the man altogether, as if the one fault of the Bible was its unfortunate habit of telling what this man or that man said, when it would have been so much simpler and more satisfactory if the matter had been cut short by putting the whole from beginning to end in the name of God.

But happily there have been those who have shown more reverence for the Scriptures as they are, who have thought that it was not in vain that our attention was called to the holy men of old who spake to their fellows the word of God ; and have shown us how well worth while it is to study these men, to make ourselves acquainted with the circumstances which formed the occasion of their utterances, to try to enter into their thoughts and feelings, and so to bring out that human side of the divine word which links it to our human lives.

Just as in the life of Christ realized as the life of a man upon the earth, we have God brought near to us, brought down into the atmosphere of our thought, so that we see His face, and feel His touch, and hear the beating of His heart ; so in the writings of these holy men of old, prophets and apostles, the word of God comes to us—not as a

succession of unearthly voices out of a far-away heaven, but as warm words of life from the throbbing, sometimes sobbing, hearts of "men of like passions with ourselves." We get them with the warmth and glow of earth's atmosphere around them. In all this not only have we the Bible made more human, while none the less divine, but we get rid of a host of difficulties which needlessly troubled our fathers, and which unhappily, and still more needlessly, trouble some of their children; for we now see that they are difficulties which are inseparable from the human medium, and do not at all affect the divine source from which the word of truth has come.

It is difficult to realize how far we have advanced already from the old days of mediæval darkness, when it was supposed to be quite disrespectful to take the Bible in its literal sense, especially those passages which deal with details of ordinary life, as for example, in the exquisite story of the courtship and marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. Hence the invention of the four different senses of Scripture. There was the literal sense, which was not supposed

to be worth anything in comparison with the three others, which were the allegorical, the figurative, and the anagogic. The effect of all this complication was first that only experts could interpret Scripture at all, and next, and more particularly, that these experts could make it mean anything they pleased. Thus the word of God was made null and void by human tradition.

The Reformation was the great corrective to this system of tampering with the sincere milk of the word; and though there is among good people still some tendency to over-spiritualize, yet the literal interpretation is no longer set aside as valueless. But we have not yet quite emerged from the period of selected texts and marked Bibles. We have not a word to say in condemnation of this. We all select texts, and should we not mark those passages in our Bibles through which the voice of God has in a special manner reached our souls? But this is not enough. One might be very familiar with the Bible in that fashion, yet enter very little into the human interest of it. Take the prophecy of Hosea as an illustration. Every Christian is familiar with such texts as, "I will allure her and

bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her"; and again, "I will heal her back-slidings; I will love her freely"; but how few comparatively have entered into the pathos of the prophet's life and the passion of his human heart; but when we do so, what added pathos in his word, and what freshness and power on the reader's heart!

There is a new vein of riches here opened up to us all through the Scriptures by those new studies which make it possible for us as never before, not only to realize that these were men of like passions with ourselves, but to lay our lives alongside of theirs and feel the very beating of their human hearts. Even the most exquisite gems of sacred Scripture will have an added beauty when seen in their setting. An old reminiscence comes in here to illustrate this, a remembrance of the impression made by the reading of Dean Stanley's introduction to his exposition on 1 Corinthians xiii. : "On each side of this chapter the tumult of argument and remonstrance still rages: but within it all is calm: the sentences move in almost rhythmical melody: the imagery unfolds itself in an almost dramatic propriety:

the language arranges itself with almost rhetorical accuracy. We can imagine how the Apostle's amanuensis must have paused to look up in his master's face at the sudden change of his style of dictation, and seen his countenance lighted up as it had been the face of an angel, as the sublime vision of divine perfection passed before him." And many of us remember what fresh human interest was given to the life and writings of St. Paul by the monumental work of Conybeare and Howson, which has since been followed up by an even closer study of his inner life and its development as bearing on his writings. These references remind us that it is a long time since this rich vein was opened up for us in regard to the New Testament writers; but it is in comparatively recent times that the same work has become accessible for the Old Testament, with the result that it has been rescued from the neglect into which it was in danger of falling, and invested with an interest which is to many almost like life from the dead.

We have spoken of apostles and prophets; may we not also refer to the new light which is shed on the life of our blessed Lord

by the realization of His true humanity? There are those who think it perilous to draw special attention to anything in our Lord's life which suggests the limitations inseparable from human nature ; but it must not be forgotten that there is corresponding peril in the opposite direction. There, frowning on our left, encircled with mists and beaten with tempests is the Scylla of rationalism which denies the divine ; but is there not on the other side, less conspicuous and therefore more deceitful, the Charybdis of irrationalism which denies the human, a whirlpool which is ready to enclose in its treacherous currents those who terrified by the frowning rock are turned from the onward course. What was the heresy against which the Apostle John uttered his most solemn warning? "Hereby," he says, "know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist." The formidable heresy of the time was that of those who represented Jesus Christ not as a real man "compassed about with infirmity," "tempted in all points

like as we are," but as God walking through life in the outward semblance of a man. And was it not this heresy that led to many of the corruptions of the Roman Church, notably the worship of the Virgin Mary, who was introduced to supply the tenderness of a truly human mediator, to make up for the supposed want of it in Him who was no longer realized as "the Man Christ Jesus"? It is true that the opposite heresy is by far the more dangerous now; still, the experience of the past ought surely to show us that it is not right or even safe to ignore or under-value the genuine humanity of our blessed Lord.

To illustrate the importance of this, we may refer to the argument which is mainly relied on by those who would set aside the Cross of Christ from its central position in our faith. It cannot be denied that all the four Evangelists give it a space out of all proportion to anything else in their records, and that the Apostles make it correspondingly prominent in their writings. But it is said, Christ Himself does not agree with them. He said very little about it, and in fact laid the emphasis on quite other things, specially on purity of heart and righteousness of life.

Now, the bare fact referred to is indeed a fact; but its significance is quite missed by those who do not enter into the true humanity of the Lord Jesus. Let it be remembered, to begin with, that it is characteristic of human nature at its best to be reticent as to that which is deepest in the soul; and if there is anything which cuts to the quick, which shakes the very foundations of our being, it is only under very special circumstances that we can be induced to speak of it at all. Now it is quite evident to the sympathetic reader of the life of our Lord as recorded by the four Evangelists, that the Cross was a subject which cut to the quick our Lord's sensitive soul, and accordingly, though ever in His thoughts, was rarely on His lips. To look forward to it even was agony, and to turn from it was the great temptation of His life—begun in the wilderness and not finally overcome until the crowning victory of Gethsemane.

Nothing is more clearly indicated than the reason why He was so late in making it the subject of instruction to His disciples. It would have been quite impossible for them even to begin to understand it until they had recognized His Divine Sonship.

We have seen already how our Lord would not teach them this dogmatically, but waited till they thought it out for themselves. But as soon as they gave evidence of seeing it, He lost not a single day. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Even before that, there had been hints of it, showing that it was only by resolute self-suppression that He refrained from plainly speaking of it, such hints as we have in His answer to the question about fasting (Matthew ix. 15), the reference to the serpent in the wilderness (John iii. 14), and the then enigmatical saying: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." And though even in the latter part of His ministry His reported words are few, the smallness of the number is more than made up for by their extraordinary weight, and by the deep emotion with which they were uttered. Think of the impact of that little word *must* in His first plain utterance, the implication of the word "ransom" in the phrase "And give His life a ransom for many," and of the word "crisis" when the

coming of the Greeks brought Him face to face with the fact, more vividly realized than ever before, that only by being "lifted up" could all men be drawn unto Him: "Now is the judgment (*literally* crisis) of this world." The whole passage (John xii. 20-32) is most significant in this connection, especially as showing the overpowering emotion which the vivid realization of the approaching sacrifice stirred in the Redeemer's soul. It was an earlier Gethsemane, and indeed to those who can read between the lines, the signs of such profound emotion are apparent all through the story, especially of the last year of the Saviour's life. As we read, we realize that in the depths of His soul there is a volcanic fire, there continually, though it only appears when some rent is made which lets it show itself on the surface. When Peter tried to turn Him from the Cross, what means that terrible agitation of soul which prompted Him to cry, "Get thee behind Me, Satan"? That too was an earlier Gethsemane. Aided by the beloved Peter, the tempter seemed irresistible. "Is this an angel of light with a suggestion to which My human nature prompts Me to respond? No, it is Satan speaking through

an angel of light, it is the old temptation of the wilderness coming in insidious disguise. Get thee behind Me, Satan." As we read on, these jets of emotion become more frequent, as when He cries, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Sometimes it is seen only in His face and mien, as when it is recorded that "He steadfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem," and again, "They were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed, and they that followed were afraid." Again we hear Him say with a very human touch of bitterness, "I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."

Is it not abundantly evident to any sympathetic reader that the Cross was always in His mind, and though His words on it were few, this only shows the depth of His emotion; and when we enter into His human heart, we understand quite well that it was because it meant so very much to Him that He could say so very little, not only because it would have broken His disciples' heart, but because it was breaking

His own. And all this impresses us the more when we find that on the one occasion when He was relieved from both restraints He spoke of nothing else! On the Mount of Transfiguration, when His disciples had fallen asleep, and He Himself was rapt in the heavenly vision and converse, "He spake (to Moses and Elias—there was no need of reticence with them) of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem."

Let this suffice as an illustration in a large way; but many examples might be given in detail of how the realization of our Lord's humanity clears away even serious difficulties. Principal Forsyth in his book on "Religion and Art" says: "Far more than half of the religious difficulties which torment people in a day like this are due to the hard, inelastic, and unsympathetic order of mind which they bring to bear upon subjects the most subtle, genial, and flexible of all." I am sure this is true, and perhaps I could not get a better example of it than one of our Lord's words uttered in the Gethsemane of John xii.; and it may be a useful way of dealing with it to transcribe the answer which I gave to a friend who propounded it to me as a serious difficulty. The question was, "Can it be

that the Lord Jesus, who was so rich and tender in all His human sympathies, was after all so much of a misanthrope that He would deliberately condemn the loving of life, and counsel the hating of it?" I repeat in what follows the substance of the answer I gave my friend.

The erroneous impression conveyed by the words is due to the old practice, so fruitful in error, of treating the Bible as a mere collection of texts, any one of which may be taken by itself and treated as if it stood alone. It is even made a matter of letters; and there are those who would say—Is it not plainly written h-a-t-e, and how can it mean anything else than hate? How then can one be considered a Christian who takes any pleasure in his life in this world? Such persons continually forget another set of letters in the same book for which they profess so much respect, which set of letters, being scanned in order, readeth thus: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." A law document is constructed to read according to the letter; but no one who wanted lively reading would choose that particular department of literature. He would prefer something that was not quite

so precise and colourless. Some people, indeed, think that it is an end of all controversy to say, "There it is in black and white"; but they forget that there are a great many things that will not go into black and white; and if nothing else than black and white is possible, as on a printed page, then there must be some soul in the person reading it to put the colour in from the suggestions of it which it is possible to give. Observe, for example, with what wonderful success a good etcher will give the suggestions of colour with only black and white to do it with.

Now the words "love" and "hate," as found here, are what we may call touches of colour. And to see the value of them we must look at the surroundings. We must first look at the whole utterance of which they form part; and then, too, we must put ourselves as much as possible into the position of the speaker, that we may look at it from his point of view. We must, in a word, deal with the text, not as consisting of so many black marks on a piece of paper, but as the warm utterance of a profoundly agitated soul. Thus we shall get above "the letter that killeth," to "the spirit that giveth life."

Following this course, then, the first thing we observe is that it is a critical moment in the Saviour's history. Perhaps we may best get the idea of the position by thinking of our Saviour as having just turned the last curve of the winding pathway of His life on earth. As He turned it, what does He see? What dark object is that, straight before Him there? It is the Cross! The shadow of it has often fallen on His pathway; but it is no shadow now—there it is, straight before Him in all its dread reality. No wonder that He cries, "Father, save Me from this hour."

It would appear that our Saviour never contemplated the Cross without an awful shrinking from it. The strain was more or less upon Him all the while, as we have already seen; but there were times when from the chronic it passed into the acute. Such a time was this, when the message from the Greeks brought vividly to His mind the innumerable multitude from every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, to which these would be the prelude; and the greatness of the thought constrained Him by a natural reaction to think of the awful cost at which alone that triumph

could be gained, realizing more vividly than He had ever done before that for this harvest, as for other harvests, the way must be prepared by death. The experience of this hour then may well be set side by side with that of Gethsemane itself, when three times in bitter agony He cried, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." It is the same agony of soul which is expressed in the passage before us: "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save Me from this hour. But for this cause came I to this hour."

We see then that the Saviour was in the midst of one of the sorest conflicts of His life. And these words were spoken in the thick of it—when all that was human in Him—His whole life, as it were, rose up in arms, and barred the way to the Cross. The temptation to turn out of the consecrated path was too strenuous, the moment was too critical, to admit of any half measures. He must not parley with such an antagonist. He must treat him as His bitterest foe, and hew a pathway through him to the Cross. The moment had come when He had to hate His life in order to save it; for what would it all have amounted

to if He had yielded now? "It was for this cause that I came to this hour; and hence there is nothing for it but to treat as My bitterest enemy all desires, however natural, to save My life at the expense of My life work."

And now is it not easy to see the force of the colouring in the words "love" and "hate," especially if we remember the Orientalism of these strong terms? The Saviour has in His mind's eye times of sharpest crisis, when a man is brought face to face with his life in this world rising against him as an adversary to bar his way, to close against him the path of duty and devotion—what then? If he love his life, he is lost; the only hope is for him to hate it, to treat it as his bitterest enemy—to run his sword through and through it, and utterly slay and quench it. When we take all this into account, we can see that the way in which our Saviour puts it is not at all too strong. It is quite parallel with that other passage in which the much-loved Peter must be hated so long as he maintains the *rôle* of Satan.

It would be easy, were there space, to give instances in which, in the Prophets

especially, passages which were dark and difficult have had a flood of light thrown on them by entering into the emotions of the writer. But I am obliged to omit even those illustrations which had been specially prepared, drawn from the great Immanuel Prophecy (Isaiah vii.-ix. 7) and from the wild and whirling words of Jeremiah in such a passage as Jeremiah xx. 7-18; for the limits assigned to this volume are already over-passed. Suffice it to say that there are scores of passages like these which were stumbling-blocks before, and now are among the most precious revealings of the human soul under the patient kindness of the Great Inspirer.

IV. All Scripture Profitable.

Though the old theory was that the Bible was all equally inspired "from cover to cover," as the phrase is, it was only a theoretical, not a practical, belief. Even the most stalwart defenders of the theory have not acted on it; or, if the attempt was made, as in the writer's case (see the Personal Foreword), it was soon given over as impracticable. For, however resolutely one may set himself to go through the whole Bible

chapter by chapter, there are considerable portions of it which to the ordinary reader are a hopeless puzzle. Possibly there may not be a single chapter in the whole Bible in which the devout soul will not find some light and leading, it may be sometimes a single verse gleaming out of the surrounding darkness, so that the exercise is never quite in vain ; but how much has been passed over—in a book like the Prophet Jeremiah, for example—with scarcely any attempt to penetrate into the soul of it.

Even the best of the commentators in the olden time scarcely grappled with the more difficult passages. A saintly genius like Matthew Henry could always find something highly spiritual to say on the most unlikely passages, but it would often be in the way of ingenious application, rather than of close exposition. It was homiletical rather than exegetical ; and in many places it was the excellent word of the good Matthew Henry, not the mind of the Spirit. And even after the era of more careful study came in, heralded by such men as Dean Alford in England and Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, there was for a long time such prevalence of the dogmatic point of view, and so little

attention paid to studying the inner life of the men, that progress for a time was slow. But now that the historico-critical method has been not only followed by scholars, but popularized by modern expositors, there are large tracts, of the Old Testament especially, which have been won from the desert, so that in many cases the wilderness and the solitary place has been made to blossom as the rose, and whole books have been lighted up with a wondrous lustre.

There is still the same delight in the old familiar passages; but these come in, even in the most difficult books, not as oases in a comparative waste but as lovely gardens in the wide landscape, and we have a joy not only in gazing on the flowers and ranging through the gardens, but in the broad views of the varied scenery of God's marvellous book of revelation. A journey through the Bible has much the same charm as a journey through the Holy Land, beginning from Mount Hermon in the north and travelling to Mount Zion in the south; for is not that grand epic of Creation with which the Bible opens like a great snow-clad mountain, rearing its head right up to heaven, not itself within the borders of

Israel any more than the epic of Creation is (for it is not till Abraham that we are in the charmed circle), but from its detached height looking down upon all; and when we reach Mount Zion on the south, are we not come to the sunny mount of God, not bare like Hermon but with a city upon it, type and prophecy of the City of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem? There is not a stage in the journey that is not full of interest; and if we were to single out any one feature as specially arresting, it would be the hills.

Some people, in going through the Bible, do not notice the hills. They keep their eyes for the most part on the ground, which seems to them a smooth and level plain, and they find perhaps many a beautiful flower and many a succulent herb, shade trees, fruit trees, Elims of peace and joy; but they do not notice the strength of the hills and the sweep of the landscape. They see them indeed, but as in a Chinese painting without perspective. That was characteristic of the era of texts and selected passages. But now we study whole books, and try to get the bearing of everything within the range of vision. And so it comes to pass that those parts of the Bible which do not mean

much as separate passages find their place in the great scheme of the whole, and the Bible becomes a glorious panorama of the unveiling of the revelation of God culminating in Christ and finding its consummation in the City of God.

We are now making less of the microscopic and more of the telescopic method of study. There are, indeed, passages of Scripture, and even single words, which will repay the most careful use of the microscope, but the larger view not only brings in all and everything, but is generally much more inspiring. The great subject of prophecy is a good illustration. If, in the study of prophecy, we make less now of mere verbal coincidences and of minute matters of detail, which to some minds give an impression of triviality out of harmony with the greatness of divine revelation, there is a more vivid realization of the grandeur of prophecy as a whole, moving on in its majestic progress to its great fulfilment in the Christ of God and His heavenly kingdom.

In this larger view of God's revelation we are getting back to the noble conception of the author of Psalm xix. (how manifestly

inspired he is !), to whom it was no mere book or roll, assemblage of words, or encyclopædia of texts, but something infinitely greater, which, scorning all comparison with books, demands for a parallel nothing less than the heavens which declare the glory of God and the firmament which showeth His handiwork ; which challenges comparison not with Socrates or Plato but with Day and Night, and for the central orb of its firmament of truth finds no image that will suit it but the Sun.

AFTER-WORD

I HAVE fallen far short of the ideal I set before me when I began this little book. I feel that it far too feebly expresses the strength of the new position and the value of the new light which has been shed upon Holy Scripture. But, indeed, no words can express the relief it is to my mind to find myself in a region where the old Bible difficulties are quite irrelevant, to be able to feel about the Bible as we all feel about the sun. There may be spots on it (or in it, if that is the better way of putting it); they tell us there are, but that does not in the least make it less a sun to me. And when I hear of these old difficulties marshalled for the thousandth time, with the expectation of destroying our faith in Christ, I think of my little grandchild of eighteen months, who, having been taught by her father to blow out first a match and then a candle, made her next attempt on the

orb of day, on an afternoon with just enough fog to make it possible for her to look straight at its great red ball. The dear child tried it again and again and again.

And the Sun is shining yet !

THE END

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